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The roles of the malcontent on the early modern English stage

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The roles of the malcontent on the early modern English stage

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Submitted for Doctor of Philosophy in English Research
King's College London

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Abstract

This thesis explores early modern audience response to the dramatic malcontent. Using a thematic approach, it builds an account that addresses the complex literary, social and political heritage of malcontent characters, and reveals the ways in which, by drawing on all the resources of early modern drama including its self-consciousness and the ambiguities of its social and moral status, these figures created relationships with their audiences that came to epitomize the potentialities of the theatre itself.

Comic and tragic malcontents from Jaques in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* (1599) to Bosola in Webster's *Duchess of Malfi* (1613–1614) struck fascinating and unsettling poses on the early modern stage. The study examines the challenge embodied in such characters and the powerful and dynamic responses they elicited through their close engagement with contemporary spectators, in the light of research into staging practices, the cultural contexts in which the plays were received, and the types of audience response that can be inferred from the surviving play texts.

Jaques's speech beginning 'All the world's a stage' resounded particularly satisfyingly at the newly opened Globe, its governing metaphor clearly echoing the early modern theatre's self-consciousness about its own processes. A striking proponent of direct address to the audience, the malcontent comments on the action of the play not only from a specific position within the dramatic illusion, but also in varying degrees of exclusion from it, characteristically initiating other self-reflexive dramatic strategies such as disguise, masques, plays-within-the-play, and metaphorical language referring to the theatre or performance (in the tradition of 'all the world's a stage'). To the extent that he wins the admiration or sympathy of spectators through the quality of his performance, he creates the disquieting effect of moral complicity. The malcontent's persona thus has the potential to embody the many pleasures and potentialities of the theatre: generating ideas and plotlines, playing with language, highlighting contradictions and predicaments, operating as a would-be stage manager as well as actor, and representing his own ideal audience.

Part 1 considers audience response in the light of early modern conceptions of subjectivity, spectatorship, and the standpoints from which ethical judgements may be formed. Ideas about the instability of the self and the plurality of roles one person

could play rendered spectators sensitive to performative aspects of the self, while the network of causes and effects depicted onstage drew attention to the problem of agency, and the apparent powerlessness of the spectator. The malcontent exploits the *theatrum mundi* metaphor to interrogate the characteristics of the genuine as opposed to the false, the natural as distinct from the constructed, and the current as contrasted with the historical, in the context of a theatrical illusion that may or may not have sought mimetic realism.

As influential as contemporary ideas about subjectivity and spectatorship were the early modern tropes of melancholia, considered in **Part 2**. Cultural assumptions about the melancholic humour, especially its links with bereavement or injustice, and its association with both intellectualism and madness, framed audience expectations of the malcontent. Biting satire and political dissent were among the more dangerous attributes associated with melancholia, along with an intrinsically theatrical type of self-presentation and a tendency to create and act out plots against perceived adversaries. Wronged women were sometimes represented in a way that approximates to the dramatic malcontent, or even to the malcontent revenger, but female characters were usually depicted in a powerless state of grief rather than melancholia. A definitive portrait of the masculine melancholic in contemplation is found in *Hamlet*, the play that most famously persuades spectators they are being addressed by a character who stands both within and outside a dramatically and socially constituted role.

The dominant issues in *Hamlet* are problems of justice and revenge. While the malcontent can hold the stage in comic, tragicomic, or tragic mode, the role is often associated with the obsessive revenger, the subject of **Part 3**. Building on the Senecan tradition, early modern drama appeared to set aside religious and legal prohibitions on personal revenge, yet these social frameworks contextualize the malcontent revenger's appeals for justice. The audience faces the challenge of reconciling incompatible moral imperatives in the light of its judgement of the revenger's career, while witnessing his ritualistic transformation from victim to perpetrator, a process that is quintessentially theatrical.

The excesses of the revenger lend themselves to satire and black humour. But melancholia may also be expressed in the type of discontent or social alienation that can be given a lighter, comic cast (as in the case of Jaques). As detailed in **Part 4**,

comedy finds a place for the malcontent not only as an object of mockery but as a counterpart to comic harmony and joy, asserting a genuine melancholia that represents a satirical view of prevailing manners and ethics. As in all other genres, the energy of the malcontent characteristically emerges in the metatheatrical effects that are instrumental in creating the distinctive frisson of the early modern playhouse. The malcontent shares with the fool or clown – that other pungent commentator upon the human condition – the privilege of free speech, and likewise occupies a liminal position from which, in comedy, the tendency is to expound social theories and establish fresh perspectives rather than perform dramatic actions. The dialogue and unexpected kinship between malcontent and clown broaden audience sympathy and create an incisive, intensely dramatic critique of contemporary life, one that becomes emblematic of the range of possibilities inherent in theatre.

Introduction

The dramatic malcontent embodies a challenge. Within the relatively safe space of the early modern playhouse, spectators bore witness as this character exposed intolerable grievances, while radical remedies for injustice were proposed and played out. The malcontent assumes the risks of retribution within the play-world, and appears to insulate the audience from the dangers posed by provocative ideas. Yet as the drama draws them in, spectators are compelled to participate in interpretive decisions based on the powerful evidence set before them, and are implicated in the moral responsibility of accepting or repudiating the judgements that the malcontent represents.

This thesis develops an account of playwrights' and spectators' engagement with the potentialities figured in the malcontent by examining shared cultural references and evolving dramatic techniques. The focus of the study is on the sets of characteristics and methods of presentation from which playwrights create variations on the malcontent type; it considers the evidence for their audience appeal, the distinctive features of the relationship between malcontent and audience, and the developments that led to such characters constituting an identifiable generic grouping of their own.

One of the most remarkable character types on the early modern stage, the malcontent was depicted by the leading playwrights of the era in a diversity of guises and dramatic genres. Scholarly inquiry into the malcontent as a dramatic type became associated long ago with the study of early modern ideas on melancholy, with the two concepts tending to become entangled. E.E. Stoll, writing in 1906, defines 'the malcontent type' as 'a melancholy figure conceived in the Elizabethan "humorous" manner'.[1] Theodore Spencer, in 'The Elizabethan Malcontent' (1948), writes that 'Hamlet is more melancholy than malcontent, yet there is an element of the malcontent in his character'.[2] Perhaps in acknowledgement of the danger that these two terms would become indistinguishable, many scholars have been tempted to propose classification systems of a rather rigid kind in their consideration of both

[1] Elmer Edgar Stoll, 'Shakspere, Marston, and the Malcontent Type', *Modern Philology*, Vol. 3 No. 3, January 1906, 281–303, p.281.
[2] Theodore Spencer, 'The Elizabethan Malcontent' in James G. McManaway, Giles E. Dawson and Edwin E. Willoughby, eds, *Joseph Quincy Adams: Memorial Studies* (Folger Shakespeare Library, 1948) p.531.

melancholic and malcontented characters, based on their readings of specific literary texts. Spencer, writing on the malcontent, depicts this character as one of five types with which melancholy is associated.[3] Discussing melancholia in *The Elizabethan Malady* a few years later, Lawrence Babb likewise classifies the malcontent as one of the melancholic types he diagnoses from his literary examples.[4]

These twentieth-century classification systems echo the early modern fashion for categorizing malcontent and melancholic character types as subjects for prose and verse satires, before they became popular dramatic personae (as discussed in Chapter 3). In surviving early modern accounts, however, the promptings of satire create a clear distinction between the melancholic and the malcontent: whereas Joseph Hall writes of the malcontent as an exemplar of particular vices, of which envy is the dominant note, Thomas Overbury's account of the melancholy man describes him as by nature a distracted, unsociable creature who indulges in morose contemplation to no purpose.[5]

This thesis resists the practice of dividing dramatic malcontent characters into categories for separate study, in favour of a thematic approach that acknowledges the complexity of the malcontent's literary, social and political heritage, and the subtleties of its dramatic expression. With the exception of an extended discussion of *Hamlet* at the heart of the thesis (Chapter 4), it proceeds by interrogating the comparisons and contrasts that emerge when considering malcontent characters in the light of different aspects of their heritage, and also within different dramatic genres and sub-genres involving revenge, satire and comedy. By examining the contexts in which early modern malcontent characters were created and received in the theatre, it aims to engage with the most significant factors that informed audience response. Among the most prominent aspects of the malcontent's theatrical presentation, it will be argued, are the range of metatheatrical effects with which these characters are consistently associated.

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[3] Ibid p.529.
[4] Lawrence Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady: A Study of Melancholia in English Literature from 1580 to 1642* (Michigan State College Press, 1951) p.76.
[5] Joseph Hall, *Characters of Virtues and Vices* (Edgar and Macham, 1608) Book 2, 'The Characterism of the Male-content', pp.99–105; Sir Thomas Overbury, *New and Choise Characters, of seuerall Authors* (Laurence Lisle, 1615), 'A Melancholie Man', sig. D6r.

With this method of inquiry, it becomes possible to distinguish, for example, the varying ways in which the cluster of ideas connected with the early modern concept of melancholia (the 'humour' most closely associated with the malcontent) shaped different dramatic characters. Following the example of Stoll – who points out that in John Marston's *The Malcontent*, Malevole is 'never once called melancholy', while in *As You Like It* Jaques 'is always called melancholy'[6] – this study also pays attention to the terminology used in the plays themselves. The declining usage of the term 'malcontent' in the Jacobean era, as Lucia Nigri points out, coincided with the achievement by this character type of 'its most powerful embodiment'.[7] This alerts us to the importance of individualizing such characters – rather than merely categorizing and labelling them – as well as investigating their shared qualities. Among the most important identifying traits of the dramatic malcontents selected for this study are the clear articulation of well-founded grievances against the state of affairs within the play-world; passionate appeals for justice; and the concomitant tendency to occupy a liminal, observer-like position in regard to that world while remaining central to its dramatic action and to the audience's engagement with it. This special relationship with spectators, usually associated with a distinctive metatheatricality, is fundamental to the argument of this thesis.

Scholars provide various contextual explanations for the prominence of the malcontent figure: they cite contemporary political and social conditions that produced discontent in certain classes of citizen, and also the cultural environment in which early modern drama flourished, especially the influence of commercially successful plays embracing Senecan revenge tropes (such as Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*). Writers were clearly drawn to the dramatic possibilities that emerged as the malcontent type became established on the stage, at once shaping and being shaped by the responses of theatre audiences.

The most striking of these malcontent figures were presented to their first audiences in plays performed by the Lord Chamberlain's Men (later the King's Men) at the Globe theatre, in the period preceding the acquisition of the indoor theatre at Blackfriars in 1608–1609. Recent research into staging practices provides evidence

[6] Stoll, 'Shakspere, Marston, and the Malcontent Type', p.284.
[7] Lucia Nigri, 'The Origin of "Malcontent" ', *Notes and Queries* Vol. 59 No.1, March 2012, 37–40, p.39; see Chapter 3.

that playgoing at the Globe involved close physical proximity between players and audience, crowding into an intimate space and in shared light, while the surviving play texts contain abundant indications of the theatrical self-consciousness that became a vibrant element in the sharing of ideas across the playhouse. Evidence shows that the dynamic interplay between audience response and the theatre's self-consciousness about its own processes generated metadramatic resonances that enriched theatregoers' experience, promoting a self-reflective exploration of the power and pleasure of drama. This metatheatricality rewarded attentive audiences with richly productive dramatic effects, which were interpretable in the light of shared cultural understandings including those concerning subjectivity, the relation between the communal and the individual, and the performativity of the self within a hierarchical society that tended to prioritize the enactment of socially defined roles.

London's theatres created an environment in which repeated playgoing became customary, so that audiences built up a knowledge of writers, genres, players, and character types. Theatres and their audiences were engaged in an evolving conversation, the nature of which can be traced in play texts, prologues and epilogues. The prologues and inductions of Ben Jonson, in particular, provide an outline of a sustained dialogue with and about his audiences. He wrote of himself at the end of his career:

He that hath feasted you these forty years
And fitted fables for your finer ears,
Although at first he scarce could hit the bore –
Yet you with patience heark'ning more and more,
At length have grown up to him and made known
The working of his pen is now your own.[8]

These lines indicate Jonson's belief that spectators established a relationship with the playwright such that, after attending with 'patience', they came to regard his works as a canon that they could claim as their 'own'. Characteristically, Jonson here indicates a process by which his audiences adapt themselves to his talent, with the playwright moulding them to his purposes rather than bowing to their tastes. Yet the commercial pressures of the theatre dictated that the characteristics and preferences of audiences – doubtless refined by contact with the work of the best writers and players – were of

[8] Ben Jonson, Prologue to *The Sad Shepherd: Or, A Tale of Robin Hood*, 1–6; quotation from David Bevington, Martin Butler and Ian Donaldson, eds, *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson* Vol. 7 (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

paramount importance; it is possible, therefore, to derive implied audience responses from an analysis of features that recur and evolve in the known canon of successful plays.

Jonson famously promoted the printing of plays as literature, but in a predominantly oral culture that valued speech and memory, regular theatregoers built up a stock of well-remembered dramatic lines and familiar stage effects. Possessing this store of theatrical references, audiences evidently expected and enjoyed the use of patterned language and well-known tropes, along with hybridity and variety in character types and genres. Spectators delighted in a verbal playfulness and allusiveness that acknowledged their shared experience, within a performance that was a social and historical event. Familiar genres and character references were re-created, interrogated and enhanced in fresh contexts, rather than imitated or merely burlesqued. Metatheatricality of this type also drew attention to the material conditions of performance, and served to emphasize the contingent and illusory nature of drama, alongside its creativity.

This thesis offers a fresh interpretation of the metatheatrical malcontent as a figure who, in his multiplicity, embodies the energies and potentialities of theatre – and of its audiences. His precariously liminal position with regard to the play-world, too, is analogous to the status of the playhouse in early modern London, intent on telling its stories while negotiating relationships with formidable power structures and unforgiving commercial realities. The challenge and stimulus that the malcontent presents to his audience is a microcosm of the challenge to conformist attitudes, and the stimulus to empathetic responses, that is represented by the theatre itself.

Scholarly theories about the metatheatricality of early modern drama were developed primarily in the 1960s and 1970s, and are in need of reassessment. Critics addressing this topic followed the lead of writers such as Lionel Abel (who described metatheatre as a dramatic form that challenged classical tragedy), Anne Righter (assessing the relation between metadrama and illusionism or mimesis), and James Calderwood (considering genre development) in concentrating their analysis on the playwright, whom they describe as adopting particular techniques and language in order to reflect on and develop his own art. This study, rather than focusing on the preoccupations of the writer, foregrounds the dynamic experience of spectators in the playhouse, where the distinctive qualities of audience attention are integral to the collaborative creation

of meaning, and to the reciprocal learning processes that help to shape the next dramatic offering.

The origins of the connection built up between an audience and the malcontent figure are to be found in the characteristically direct forms of address inherited from medieval drama. Asserting a distinctiveness that intensely engages an audience, the malcontent's soliloquies and asides are almost always of a confiding nature, rather than a merely functional means of imparting information. Like the medieval Vice, the malcontent has a pressing need to explain himself, and a notable talent for eliciting strong reactions, including both complicity and condemnation. The voice of the malcontent is a dominant one, and the account of his career has a matching dramatic power. This narrative can take several forms: the malcontent character may be primarily a plotter, or a victim of plots; he may be subject to melancholia, or mental instability, or for tactical reasons may affect to suffer from these conditions. He often adopts the tone of the satirist. The biographical roots of his discontent lie in his social displacement and consequent powerlessness. As Spencer writes, 'The malcontent differs from the melancholy man in the cause of his state of mind', a cause rooted in a loss of social status.[9] This characteristic was perhaps most succinctly delineated in the words of De Flores in Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling*, more than a decade after the Globe plays that are at the core of this study. By this time, two lines of verse are sufficient to identify De Flores with one of the major tropes of the malcontent: 'Though my hard fate has thrust me out to servitude, / I tumbled into th' world a gentleman'.[10]

As this study will show, the malcontent is dispossessed and alienated – and he is male. Gender politics dictated that although wronged women could manifest some elements of the malcontent role, they could not sustain it. The malcontents who are the prime focus of this study hold grievances that are patently justified, demonstrate a keen insight into the corruption of society, and have the opportunity and determination to perform a purgative function. The revenger driven by a grievance fits this profile, but the malcontent is not confined to the context of a classic revenge play. When he takes up his stance in response to adversity, his resistance has a satiric but not necessarily a

[9] Spencer, 'The Elizabethan Malcontent', p.529.
[10] Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, *The Changeling* II.i.48–49; quotation from Douglas Bruster, ed., *The Changeling* in Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino, eds, *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works* (Clarendon Press, 2007).

tragic cast, and a comic version of the malcontent also trod the early modern stage. This thesis will trace the development and significance of the comic malcontent, a topic largely overlooked in critical discourse.

Often, however, the laughter elicited by a dramatic malcontent was of the brittle variety with which audiences respond to black humour, to parody, and to the outrageously shocking. Malcontents are usually depicted in conflict with a royal or ducal court, and are trenchant critics of the whole tenor of courtly life. This oppositional dimension to the character is commonly interpreted in a political context: as Elizabeth I's reign drew to an end, and subsequently amid the corruption and favouritism associated with the Jacobean court, a climate of dissatisfaction was created in some quarters by political instability and the loss of traditional avenues for advancement. The construction of new identities was called for in these changing times, and as personified in the malcontent they centred on the ambitions of the self in a battle with inequity and injustice. The related dramatic persona of the disguised ruler – who opposes usurping enemies in order to reclaim a legitimate and ethical power base – was another symbol of this longing for benign, stable government. Like the malcontent, the figure of the disguised ruler is also suggestive of a certain unease at the omnipotence of all-seeing rulers who have impressive powers of surveillance, but whose purposes are not necessarily decipherable. The eponymous hero of Marston's *The Malcontent* combines (in an unusual tragicomic context) the resourcefulness and subterfuge of a deposed but legitimate ruler with the cynicism and satirical dissent of the malcontent figure.

The Malcontent and *Hamlet* both appeared on the London stage as the Elizabethan era gave way to the Jacobean. After 1599, Shakespeare wrote no more history plays (until collaborating on *Henry VIII*). Political considerations, as one reign drew to its end and another began, may have played a part in this decision. But there may also have been a practical, commercial incentive for a change in direction at the Globe. In terms of the acting company, the histories had been ensemble pieces, while the new malcontent plays (together with the major tragedies) provided star vehicles for leading players. Richard Burbage was in his prime, and the new dramas doubtless appealed to the Globe audience's growing appreciation of fine acting skills, capitalizing on the beginnings of celebrity status for favourite actors.

Theatre provided a relatively open forum for political and social commentary in a highly regulated society, a reality that was indirectly acknowledged during their reigns by both Elizabeth and James: each monarch compared the exposure involved in the performance of royalty to that of actors on the public stage. Elizabeth declared, in a 1586 speech to a deputation from Parliament: 'we Princes, I tell you, are set on stages, in the sight and view of all the world duly observed', and James wrote that a king is 'as one set on a stage, whose smallest actions and gestures, all the people gazingly doe behold'.[11] Both monarchs also promoted theatrical performance as a royal pastime, with James concentrating patronage of the playing companies into the hands of the royal family upon his accession in 1603.

The leading place was claimed by the Globe's company when it was transformed from the Lord Chamberlain's Men into the King's Men. Since Shakespeare subsequently wrote only for this company, it can be assumed that an intimate working relationship developed between the players and their in-house playwright, but the Globe company also performed popular works by other successful writers. The insights provided by recent research into playing practices at early modern theatres, and the material conditions in which their plays were produced and received, have increasingly directed critical interest towards the companies' repertories as distinct bodies of work. Moreover, when considering early modern audience response, an emphasis on performance rather than on text is necessary: Erika Lin, by comparing the size of print runs with estimates of playhouse attendance, has calculated that 97% of all encounters with plays would have been in performance.[12]

This study of malcontents and their audiences is principally concerned with *As You Like It*, *Hamlet*, *The Malcontent*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and the slightly later *The Duchess of Malfi*, all of which are known to have been performed at the Globe. Plays associated with other acting companies and playhouses are selected for comparative study, since they were important contributors to the theatrical culture of both audiences and playwrights.

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[11] John E. Neale, *Elizabeth I and Her Parliaments 1584–1601* (St Martin's Press, 1958), p.119; *Basilikon Doron* Book 3 in *The Workes of the Most High and Mightie Prince, James* (James Montagu, 1616) p.180.

[12] Erika T. Lin, *Shakespeare and the Materiality of Performance* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) p.13.

The thesis is arranged in four parts addressing distinct themes. The first explores audience response to the malcontent in terms of ideas that spectators were likely to bring with them to the playhouse about subjectivity, spectatorship and the performative aspects of the self, together with theories about acting. It considers issues of theatrical dynamics including the transmission of emotion across the playhouse, and the contributions of the audience to the dramatic experience. Early modern ideas about the unreliability of the senses were subject to manipulation by a malcontent figure drawing attention to false appearances while insisting upon his own use of disguise and deceit. Since playwrights and players were motivated to explore the different ways in which spectators could respond to drama in the newly established playhouses, their work developed a characteristic self-reflexiveness, and this first part of the thesis goes on to explore the ways in which the malcontent exploits the *theatrum mundi* metaphor and highlights the interplay between the dramatic illusion and metadramatic self-awareness, which resonates with the malcontent's persona as a skilled and resourceful performer.

The malcontent emerges as an unreliable witness, particularly given his susceptibility to melancholic humours. The second part of the thesis discusses the shared iconography of melancholia, and the staging of this familiar disposition in such a way that melancholia is directed outwards, finding dramatic expression for the resentment, political dissent and satire of the malcontent. Melancholia is readily associated with a theatrical mode of behaviour and, as Lynda Christian writes, 'The pessimism, incisiveness, and imaginative power of the melancholic leads him to draw the comparison between the world and the stage very frequently'.[13] This part of the thesis goes on to explore the power with which Hamlet voices the perspective of the archetypally metadramatic malcontent. Hamlet's observations on the nature of dramatic performance and on the difficulties of purposeful action highlight the link between the malcontent's scripted words, his staged actions, and his relation to his audiences, a nexus which – in the play as a whole – establishes him as an indispensable representative of the imperative to challenge corrupt systems, but also demonstrates that, especially in projects of violent revenge and sweeping social reform, failures of morality and efficacy are inherent in the malcontent's actions.

[13] Lynda G. Christian, *Theatrum Mundi: The History of an Idea* (Garland, 1987) p.154.

All dramatic malcontents are depicted seeking a type of revenge against the society that offends or disregards them but, as noted above, it is the classic revenger with a deeply held grievance who most powerfully expresses certain aspects of the malcontent's persona. The third part of this thesis looks at the malcontent revenger's role and the staging of the dilemmas that were associated in the early modern mind with the concept of vengeance. The revenge genre interrogates the ethics and logic of revenge, creating a context within which the malcontent can dare the audience to entertain radical ideas in the face of incompatible moral imperatives. The genre's dramatic structure embraces the metadrama of role-play, ritual and satire to express the complexity of the malcontent psyche, so that as he struggles to assert himself the audience's experience in the theatre is of the unfolding of truths that lie behind the workings of dramatic techniques.

The final part considers audience response to the comic or tragicomic malcontent. In comedy, any inauthentic expression of discontent may be mocked, but genuine melancholia also has a place as a counterpoint to the trajectory of the comic plot. An unexpected affinity arises between the malcontent and the clown, both of whom are outsiders exploiting their freedom of speech. Evidence points to a special emphasis being placed upon the metatheatricality of these character types for the Globe audience. Clown and malcontent both develop social theories more readily than they perform dramatic actions, and these speculations provide an alternative focus for audience attention, establishing a satirical undertone, but also highlighting limitations on the power of disapproving or ironic commentators to effect real social change. The energy of the malcontent, therefore, is that of an ironically self-aware character engaging an audience through incisive and powerfully expressed critiques of contemporary life. Defying the limitations imposed on him by his dramatic situation, the malcontent draws attention to the uncertainties about free expression faced by the early modern theatre itself, and with his striking stage presence and singular voice, he embodies its challenge to its audiences.

Part 1 Theatre and metatheatre

Chapter 1 Subjectivity and spectatorship in the early modern playhouse

When an actor first appeared as Hamlet on the Globe stage, dressed in black and speaking in an aside, and when a few years later another actor – or perhaps the same one – entered to address the audience as Vindice, holding a skull in a way that recalled a powerful scene from *Hamlet*, what kind of audience reactions were sought and received? In order to begin finding answers to such questions, this chapter explores the cultural contexts impacting upon both the depiction and the reception of malcontent figures on the early modern stage. Its particular enquiry, as throughout this study, concerns the metatheatrical effects associated with malcontent characters, and the conditions of spectatorship that shaped audience responses.

These responses depended on the range of contemporary significations attaching to dramatic characters, which – this chapter argues – derived from prevailing concepts related to subjectivity, the self, the playing of roles, and the functions of drama. Theories on the formation of temperaments, including their connections to the bodily 'humours', influenced the creation and interpretation of verbal and physical events onstage. The skills of professional actors developed in a context where orthodox thinking warned of the moral and philosophical dangers of 'counterfeiting', which were most forcefully articulated by the antitheatricalists. These criticisms co-existed uneasily alongside the popular reception of play-acting as a valued skill. Forming a counter-narrative to the condemnation of theatre practice were both its claimed didactic values, inherited from medieval morality drama, and its links to reputable traditions involving displays of rhetorical skill and the performance of public ceremony or celebration. In light of these factors, but with limited direct evidence, scholars have debated the acting styles that might have been employed to obtain the desired reactions from paying customers in the playhouses.

Both appropriate and inappropriate responses to drama are modelled within the plays by onstage audiences. Reactions to the dramatic illusion are often depicted as extreme: 'In tragedies, audiences at plays-within-the-play are devastated, brought to tears, startled, and killed; in comedies, they are moved to laughter, driven to lust, and

agitated into redirecting the plot'.[1] This chapter discusses the experience and expression of emotions in the playhouse, along with the ways in which ideas concerning the reliability of the senses as conduits of knowledge about the world affected presentation and interpretation of playhouse events.

Responses filtered through such prevailing cultural assumptions may have been experienced as relatively unmediated, but it is fundamental to this study to consider the audience's self-consciousness about its spectator status, and the role that theories of verisimilitude or symbolic representation played in constructing intellectual frameworks for the interpretation of the dramatic experience. Judgements were expressly solicited and made in the theatre, so it is important to examine the grounds upon which these judgements were held to be both needful and valid.

Jennifer Low and Nova Myhill point out 'the most fundamental problem of working with the early modern audience: evidence. The overwhelming majority of playgoers left no record of their attendance, let alone their reactions'.[2] Much recent research has, however, provided valuable insights into playhouse practices, audience experience, and contemporary psychological theories, and this chapter applies scholars' understanding of some of these topics to an analysis of likely responses to the dramatic malcontent figure in the first decade of the seventeenth century. First, it is necessary to note those aspects of early modern ideas about the self that are essential to the depiction and reception of the dramatic malcontent.

Subjectivity and the self

The contention, popular in the 1980s, that the seventeenth century invented the idea of the self, or the 'human subject' – even that such an invention could be traced to the first stage utterances of the title character in *Hamlet*[3] – has been debunked by more

[1] Katharine A. Craik and Tanya Pollard, eds, Introduction to *Shakespearean Sensations: Experiencing Literature in Early Modern England* (Cambridge University Press, 2013) p.1.
[2] Jennifer A. Low and Nova Myhill, eds, *Imagining the Audience in Early Modern Drama, 1558–1642* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) p.9.
[3] Francis Barker, writing in 1984, implies the invention can be pinpointed to the moment in I.ii.85 when Hamlet claims to have 'that within which passes show': *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection* (University of Michigan Press, 2nd ed., 1995) p.31. This idea was supported by Catherine Belsey in *The Subject of Tragedy* (Methuen, 1985) p.41. All quotations from *Hamlet* are unless otherwise noted from Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, eds, *Hamlet* Second Quarto, Arden edition (Bloomsbury, 2016).

recent scholars.[4] Yet few dispute that, as Robert N. Watson puts it, the period saw 'a discernible increase in individualism',[5] and more specifically that, in the words of Anthony B. Dawson, 'within the institution of the theatre there developed a new *aesthetic* interest in interiorized personhood based on at least the illusion of depth, and providing a paradigm for what we mean by "character", even by "self".'[6]

Scholarship on the early modern idea of the self has developed intriguing insights into contemporary conceptions of subjectivity and their influences upon playhouse experience. Charles Whitney notes that emerging ideas about an autonomous self 'co-existed with traditional understanding of the influence of bodily humors and spirits'.[7] It seems clear that spectators, whom Dawson (quoted above) describes as taking an '*aesthetic* interest' in the psychology of stage characters, might also take a *moral* interest, coloured by prevailing religious views, as well as what might be termed a *social* interest, influenced by the contemporary elaboration of Galenic humours theory. These theories explained behaviour that was moral or immoral, constructive or destructive, by reference to a person's physiological constitution, associated with a particular temperament or 'complexion'. Within the increasingly elaborated and flexible framework of humours theory, characters could be instantly legible in typological terms yet convincingly individual. As John Lee indicates,[8] when Hamlet labels himself 'pigeon-livered' and claims to 'lack gall' he is self-diagnosing a physiological problem, using terms popularly associated with bodily humours and their corresponding temperaments (II.ii.512). Yet it is a critical commonplace that Hamlet more usually emphasizes performative aspects of the self, especially the playing of roles and the use of disguise. Hamlet may be regarded, or regard himself, as subject to the physiological traits of the coward or the melancholic, but he possesses the agency not only to defy these but to affect madness and to mimic a bloodthirsty revenger. He also challenges the audience from the outset on the topic of

[4] Such as David Aers, 'Reflections on current histories of the subject', *Literature and History*, Vol. 2 Issue 2, Fall 1991, 20–34.
[5] Robert N. Watson, 'Tragedy' in A.R. Braunmuller and Michael Hattaway, eds, *Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge University Press, 2003) p.295.
[6] Anthony B. Dawson and Paul Yachnin, *The Culture of Playgoing in Shakespeare's England: A Collaborative Debate* (Cambridge University Press, 2001) p.20, italics in original.
[7] Charles Whitney, *Early Responses to Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge University Press, 2006) p.24.
[8] John Lee, *Shakespeare's Hamlet and the Controversies of Self* (Oxford University Press, 2000) pp.154–155.

role-playing by pointing out that there are 'actions that a man might play' (I.ii.84), such as the outward expression of grief.

In a way that is characteristic of several varieties of dramatic malcontent (as this study will show), Hamlet opens up a space not only between the diagnosable type and the more elusive individual, but also between a traditional theatrical role and the specific staged character. The gap between the two halves of this double self, like that between actor and role, is analogous, in the community at large, to the space between an individual and his or her social role – an especially pertinent matter in a rigidly hierarchical society. Outside as well as inside the theatre, social identity was publicly performed, through the use of language, costume and gesture, and it was always understood to stand in relation to other publicly performed identities. Early modern drama therefore inherited social as well as theatrical traditions favouring the depiction of representative types (held to illustrate 'universal truths') rather than individuals. It also developed in a political and religious climate in which individuality was suspect. But its presentation of multifaceted characters drew upon an audience's ability to bridge conceptual gaps between subjectivity and social roles, to embrace ambiguity and experience empathy.

Theories about definable human types and pre-ordained social roles had always been destabilized by their inherent contradictions. Humours theory claimed that the body was ruled by the balance of its fluids, and therefore was unstable and perpetually changeable. Emotions were considered to be correspondingly volatile, and carried a constant potential for causing disruption of various kinds. Theatre dramatized the dichotomy between a private self that was poorly defined and mutable, yet unique and vivid, and a rigidly defined yet abstract public self; it portrayed conflicts between emotion and reason, and between a desire for freedom or independent agency and a need for security or belonging.

In *The Shattering of the Self*, Cynthia Marshall frames these contradictions in rather different terms. In her view, the emerging 'autonomous subject' and 'the nascent ethos of individualism' are clearly delineated phenomena, and it is the tension with an 'older understanding' that tends to destabilize them, resulting in 'the uneasy consolidation of early modern subjectivity'. In the theatre this process led, Marshall claims, to 'an aesthetic of shattering or self-negation'. She argues that audiences were afforded, particularly through depictions of violence, 'the considerable pleasure' of

'experiences of shattering or dissolution', which were 'moments of allowable reversion to the unstable and poorly defined idea of selfhood familiar from humoral psychology'.[9] Whatever the validity of Marshall's analysis, her ideas about audience response to the 'dissolution' of the theatrical character are suggestive. It is clear that the embodiment of a character on stage is a temporary (although possibly recurring) phenomenon, and the character's disappearance – whether as a result of violence or simply as a function of the drama reaching its conclusion – offers a structural resolution that is basic to theatrical experience. The embodied character vanishes from the stage to become once more a mere function of the playwright's and actor's work, to be deliberated over by the audience (if at all) in conceptual terms.

The idea of a stable, integrated selfhood (that which, according to Marshall, is subject to 'shattering') suggests a reliance on psychological consistency, which was not an established paradigm in early modern thinking. The instability of the self was a commonplace not only within humours theory but in the classical tradition upon which writers in the early modern period depended. One such writer, Michel de Montaigne, composed pioneering autobiographical essays that were translated into English by Shakespeare's associate John Florio in 1603. Montaigne asserts of the study he is making of himself:

> though the lines of my picture change and vary, yet loose they not themselves. The world runnes all on wheeles. All things therein moove without intermission; […] *Constancy it selfe is nothing but a languishing and wavering dance*. I cannot settle my object; it goeth so unquietly and staggering, with a natural drunkennesse. […] I describe not the essence, but the passage; not a passage from age to age, or as the people reckon, from seaven yeares to seaven, but from day to day, from minute to minute. My history must be fitted to the present. I may soone change, not onely fortune, but intention.[10]

Rather than stability and consistency, evidence points to an early modern tendency to emphasize a plurality of roles (with regard to actions) and states (of mind or emotion). This reflects the contemporary significance of hierarchically imposed social roles, and of religious ideas about states of grace or of the soul. The dramatic malcontent inhabits a familiar mental state and social position (as will be discussed in Chapter 3), but this framework may nevertheless struggle to contain a volatile character, and one

[9] Cynthia Marshall, *The Shattering of the Self: Violence, Subjectivity, and Early Modern Texts* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002) pp.2, 4.
[10] 'Of repenting', *Montaigne's Essays*, Vol. 3, translated by John Florio (J.M. Dent, 1965) p.23, italics in original.

full of vitality and potential. Psychological verisimilitude was achieved on the stage by the expression of individuality within an identified social role and emotional/humoral state. This is true of all character types in the theatre, but the malcontent, it will be argued in this study, has unique significance for the audience and is highly dependent on the effects of audience engagement.

Recognition of the potential for a plurality of roles lies behind the stage tradition of impenetrable disguise. Robert Weimann and Douglas Bruster write: 'On stages to graft the image of a second person onto a fictitious identity may seriously disturb the perception of character'.[11] But as audiences witness the donning of a disguise, in the form of changes to voice, costume and/or physicality, they not only come face to face with the 'difference between the craft of performance and the art of imaginary identity'.[12] Simultaneously, they may experience enhanced appreciation of that craft and a more profound apprehension of the created identity, as the disguised character reveals more about his or her potential selves. Playwrights were evidently confident that they could achieve effects of audience complicity in the deception of disguise by granting privileged knowledge about its creation and about the character using such a device. A new viewpoint upon the character's identity and purposes is disclosed.

A play in performance needs to particularize, to turn the general and abstract into the concrete and dramatic, and to convincingly create temporary 'selves' or 'sites of subjectivity'. In his discussion of the 'self' in *Hamlet*, John Lee objects that the prince does not pose the personal question 'Who am I?' but rather the impersonal 'What is a man?'.[13] In fact, because the question is framed and understood in ways that relate to Hamlet as an individual and his immediate predicament, this is an excellent example of the way that drama turns abstract enquiry into urgent and specific dilemmas. Hamlet is understood to be raising questions about 'a man' because he needs profound answers that relate to his current situation and his possible courses of action. Although drama cannot offer a complete overview of a set of circumstances, and depicts only selected events and that which its characters can articulate from moment to moment, these elements combine (at their best) to suggest a whole world. In Katharine Eisaman Maus's words, theatre relies on its ability to 'foster theatregoers'

[11] Robert Weimann and Douglas Bruster, *Shakespeare and the Power of Performance: Stage and Page in the Elizabethan Theatre* (Cambridge University Press, 2008) p.119.
[12] Ibid pp.155–156.
[13] Lee, *Shakespeare's Hamlet and the Controversies of Self*, p.156.

capacity to use partial and limited presentations as a basis for conjecture about what is undisplayed or undisplayable. Its spectacles are understood to depend upon and indicate the shapes of things unseen'.[14] Thus it anticipates not only an audience's willingness to engage, but its powers of creativity. These powers are expressed within a shared context of dramatic and social conventions.

One of the greatest achievements of early modern theatre was to draw on earlier performance traditions while breaking new ground in a way that brought together, as Anne Righter puts it, the 'mediaeval sense of contact with the audience with the concept of the self-sufficient play'.[15] The dramatic malcontent inhabits a believable stage world but is typically a liminal character, marginalized by the society depicted, often physically at the edge of the stage[16] and figuratively at the boundaries of the theatrical illusion because of his tendency to communicate directly with the audience and to comment upon the action. Paradoxically, however, he is also firmly embedded in the play-world in that he both clarifies and challenges its power structures. For this reason the malcontent (albeit sometimes loosely defined) became a focus of critical enquiry into early modern theatre's challenge to, or tendency to be captured by, the ideologies of power. Jonathan Dollimore's 1984 analysis of Jacobean tragic malcontents[17] emphasizes the estrangement from prevailing orthodoxies that such characters either manifest in themselves or induce in an audience. He suggests that malcontents thus function to subvert these ideologies by revealing them to be invalid, unstable, and in the service of entrenched power. A few years earlier, Stephen Greenblatt – in his account of the construction of early modern selfhood – describes being led to the view that the creation of subjectivity was 'the ideological product of the relations of power in a particular society'[18] and that processes of 'containment' either negate all challenges to power or immediately replace discredited strategies of subjection with new ones. In this view the malcontent, and indeed the theatre itself, becomes a mere tool in the self-sustaining evolution of established power.

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[14] Katharine Eisaman Maus, *Inwardness and Theatre in the English Renaissance* (University of Chicago Press, 1995) p.32.
[15] Anne Righter (later Barton), *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* (Chatto and Windus, 1962) p.79.
[16] See Chapter 2 for a discussion of the stage positioning of the malcontent character.
[17] In *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).
[18] Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (University of Chicago Press, 2005) p.256.

More recent critics have rejected this model of subversion and containment to focus on the dynamic nature of the challenges offered by the theatre. Steven Mullaney, for example, has written that the 'amphitheater playhouses produced new kinds of plays but they also produced a new kind of cognitive and affective space […] It was a space expressly designed to resonate with an audience newly uncertain of its individual and collective identities – custom-built, in other words, to plumb and sound out the gaps that had been opened in the Elizabethan social body as a consequence of the English Reformation'.[19] Those 'gaps' are searchingly investigated, as this study will show, when the Montaignean scepticism and self-scrutiny of many malcontent characters clash with a destructive and ruthlessly Machiavellian power structure. The malcontent may nevertheless be somewhat complicit with this power structure, or at least does not shrink from appropriating its methods (in particular, its violence) for his own ends. Thus the malcontent may be regarded as operating in the risky and ambiguous moral space that characterizes the theatre itself: reliant on its noble patrons and on the tolerance of the authorities, the theatre engages in commercial transactions with its audience while simultaneously offering them a space in which a critique of power and of transactional relations can be formulated.

If the malcontent is understood as a possible microcosm of the theatre, a site of subjectivity created from and personifying its energies and contradictions, his relationship to his audience acquires even more urgency. The next questions to consider are how his actions and words are communicated to this audience, and what theories spectators might bring to bear as they interpret the performance of the actor.

Early modern acting styles and theories

Theatres relied on actors working on a relatively bare stage to represent characters and action, rather than on scenery to indicate location; words and gestures, costumes and props were the acting companies' tools of communication, and the focus was on the players' bodies and voices. The physical presence of the actor, in both his fictional and real aspect, was palpable in the intimate space. In the case of the Globe, scholars generally agree that – although the exact size of its stage cannot be known – this theatre was 'large enough to allow for freedom of movement, yet small enough and

[19] Steven Mullaney, *The Reformation of Emotions in the Age of Shakespeare* (University of Chicago Press, 2015) p.46.

close enough to the audience to highlight discrete details of body language'.[20] Since spectators closely surrounded the actors, their experience – certainly for more intimate scenes – would have been one of sharing space with the actors, and their reactions were essential to the drama. Only in scenes of overt pageantry or public ceremony were audiences turned into more passive witnesses of a spectacle, and even then they were often implicitly recruited as part of the illusion, to represent imagined spectators within the scene. As Sarah Dustagheer writes, 'the physical configuration of a round space and shared lighting […] enabled a direct and intense engagement between actor and audience and the blurring between fictional and real crowds that facilitates representations of public space'.[21]

The status of actors and the acting profession was improving in the early modern period, alongside their acquisition of aristocratic patronage, and scholars have noted a change in the terminology applied to them. The derogatory designation 'common players' was no longer attached to those individuals admired for their skill; as Mary Jo Kietzman puts it, 'there was a trend toward defining *actors* (as distinct from *players*), characterizing them in a positive light, and giving them status as professionals'.[22] Research on acting companies, their patrons and their audiences may provide evidence for what Kietzman calls 'the gentrification of the theater that took place in the latter years of the sixteenth century', but it does not, unfortunately, provide support for speculation about any pronounced shift in acting styles, for example from formal and rhetorical practices towards what we would today regard as naturalism. Kietzman notes that the intimacy of the Globe 'enabled the actor to counterfeit naturalistic physical behavior',[23] and there are oft-cited written accounts of contemporaries' admiration for lifelike acting, such as the comment on Richard Burbage in Sir Thomas Overbury's *Characters*: 'what we see him personate, we thinke truely done before us'.[24] There is also evidence that what John Astington terms

[20] Jacalyn Royce, 'Early Modern Naturalistic Acting: The Role of the Globe in the Development of Personation', in Richard Dutton, ed., *Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theatre* (Oxford University Press, 2009) p.477.
[21] Sarah Dustagheer, *Shakespeare's Two Playhouses: Repertory and Theatre Space at the Globe and the Blackfriars, 1599–1613* (Cambridge University Press, 2017) p.168.
[22] Mary Jo Kietzman, 'Will Personified: Viola as Actor–Author in *Twelfth Night*', *Criticism*, Vol. 54 No. 2, Spring 2012, 257–289, p.257.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Sir Thomas Overbury, *New and Choise Characters, of seuerall Authors* (Laurence Lisle, 1615), 'An excellent Actor', sig. M6r.

the ‘verbal extravagance and rhetorical elaboration of the Marlovian school’ was subjected to ‘literary parody and mockery, as a sign of being over the top, so that acting that accommodated to that style, observing its particular decorum of emphasis and bravura display, became tarred with the same brush’.[25] But it is impossible to reconstruct the style of acting that was regarded as creating a convincing portrayal of a stage persona, let alone how it may have developed over the period.[26] Today, with an archive of recorded performances spanning more than a century, it has become clear that perceptions change about the boundaries between acting that is considered stylized and conventional, or even overblown, and that which is held to represent the lifelike and natural. Research into early modern acting theory has found indications of conventional gestures, costumes, props, and facial expressions that were commonly held to indicate a type or a stock character,[27] but the performance that was considered to depict a believable individual (either within or independently of such stock roles) is not recoverable.

Scholars point out that although playing conditions (limited rehearsal time, for example) favoured the typecasting of actors and the presentation of stock characters, evidence shows that individual actorly skill was praised, and that audiences enjoyed the experience of empathizing with believable characters.[28] Evelyn Tribble posits that players aiming to transcend ‘stock practices or routines’ were able to succeed in such conditions ‘by creating and embedding themselves within physical, social and material smart structures. These structures included the playhouse itself, governed by shared conventions of movement across the stage; cognitive artefacts such as the part and the plot; the strong social bonds fostered by the system of sharers in the playhouses; and the regimes of training and education that undergirded their practice’.[29]

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[25] John Astington, *Actors and Acting in Shakespeare’s Time: The Art of Stage Playing* (Cambridge University Press, 2010) pp.175–176.
[26] ‘There is not very much direct evidence about the style of acting that developed in London from the 1590s onwards’: Andrew Gurr and Mariko Ichikawa, *Staging in Shakespeare’s Theatres* (Oxford University Press, 2000) p.70.
[27] For example, Farah Karim-Cooper writes of ‘a gestural vocabulary that spectators would have understood’, but warns that ‘theatrical gesture in early modern performance defies strict codification’, in *The Hand on the Shakespearean Stage* (Bloomsbury Arden, 2016) p.87.
[28] For example, Siobhan Keenan, *Acting Companies and their Plays in Shakespeare’s London* (Bloomsbury, 2014) pp.102, 105.
[29] Evelyn Tribble, *Early Modern Actors and Shakespeare’s Theatre: Thinking with the Body* (Bloomsbury, 2017) p.4.

The malcontent role carried its own iconography (discussed in Chapter 3), but the close relationship enjoyed with the audience was inherited from a tradition in earlier drama, where the maligned fool or the disruptive Vice could comment on the action and mediate between stage action and spectators.[30] Like the clown, the manipulative Vice was clearly playing a role and 'possessed a quality which associated him naturally with the actor'.[31] The malcontent's overt and metatheatrical plotting developed from this tradition. Yet what is striking about the great dramatic malcontents who stalked the early modern stage is their individuality and moral ambiguity. Actors tasked with these roles relied on the collaboration of the audience not only to establish a relationship as metadramatic commentator but to create a believable character within the parameters of this recognizable type, while stretching the boundaries of old moral certainties. Doubtless the proximity of the audience enabled the actor to vary his performance style from naturalistic, even intimate voice and gesture to more stylized or exaggerated physicality in order to achieve comic, tragic or other thought-provoking effects.

Corresponding to the meaningful variation in the use of nouns such as 'player' and 'actor' were the verbs chosen to describe what these personages did on stage, which likewise pointed to differing perspectives on their value and skill. The word 'personate', as seen in the comment in Sir Thomas Overbury's *Characters* quoted above, appears to suggest verisimilitude, achieving the illusion of *being* rather than imitating, as distinct from the more neutral 'act', the perhaps less skilful 'play', and the usually negative 'counterfeit'.[32] The latter suggests inauthenticity and deceit, whereby verisimilitude is dangerous. In translating Montaigne's comment that little skill is needed to counterfeit more virtue than one possesses – 'Every one may play the jugler, and represent an honest man upon the stage'[33] – Florio chooses the more neutral word 'represent', directly rendering Montaigne's *representer*. (As will be discussed in Chapter 2, the term 'represent' is today often used in contradistinction to

[30] Both Shakespeare's Richard III and Feste frankly declare to the audience that they are like the Vice figure, as will be discussed in Chapters 2 and 7.
[31] Righter, *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play*, p.68.
[32] Andrew Gurr points out the distinction drawn by Ben Jonson on the title page of *The New Inn*, where he claims that this work was: 'never acted, but most negligently play'd'; *The Shakespearean Stage 1574–1642*, Fourth Edition (Cambridge University Press, 2009) p.118.
[33] 'Of repenting', *Montaigne's Essays*, trans. John Florio, p.27.

the verb 'present' to indicate respectively 'true-to-lifeness' and 'rhetorical formalism'.)[34]

The term 'personate' is relatively rare in play texts of the period. John Marston is usually credited with the first occurrence of the term, using it once at the very beginning (as if for emphasis) of the discussion about the distribution of parts in the Induction to *Antonio and Mellida* (1599–1600); the less prestigious verbs 'act' and 'play' are used thereafter. To Shakespeare, at least, 'personation' seems to signify that a portrayal is convincing, but it should be noted that he uses the term in connection with written depictions rather than enacted ones. In *Twelfth Night* Maria claims that she can forge a letter in which Malvolio 'shall find himself most feelingly personated',[35] and at the beginning of *Timon of Athens* the Poet asserts the aptness of his work thus: 'One do I personate of Lord Timon's frame'.[36] The fact that both Maria and the Poet are here boasting about their skill in creating pen-portraits indirectly supports the otherwise rather idiosyncratic use of the term 'personation' by Robert Weimann and Douglas Bruster, to whom it signifies the 'exposure of the actor behind the dramatic role and its persona. Personation privileges the *making of* the mask, the *skill* and the *show* of playing the role of another'.[37]

Clearly, even the most skilled acting does not remove an audience's ability to perceive both actor and role simultaneously. The physical resemblance of a player to the person represented was evidently not necessary to an early modern performance, otherwise the boy playing Cleopatra could never have succeeded. Indeed, audiences apparently enjoyed and responded to the interplay between actor and role; they could remain outside the illusion observing theatrical skills (and ironic dissonances, such as those related to gender and age in the case of boy players), while simultaneously immersed in the collaborative creation of a vivid personality. Andrew Gurr writes that 'By 1600 Burbage's Hamlet exemplified the chief requisite of a successful player, his

[34] Peter Thomson, 'The Elizabethan Actor: A Matter of Temperament', *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, Vol. 20 No. 1, 2000, 4–13, p.4. In this connection, too, there is a claim that an innovation in dramatic possibilities can be traced to a particular moment in *Hamlet*; Thomson writes that 'The shift from presentational to representational acting is adumbrated in the "Hecuba" exchange between Hamlet and the First Player'.
[35] *Twelfth Night* II.iii.154; quotation from Keir Elam, ed., *Twelfth Night*, Arden edition (Bloomsbury, 2008).
[36] *Timon of Athens* I.i.71; quotation from Anthony B. Dawson and Gretchen E. Minton, eds, *Timon of Athens*, Arden edition (Bloomsbury, 2008).
[37] Weimann and Bruster, *Shakespeare and the Power of Performance: Stage and Page in the Elizabethan Theatre*, p.5, italics in original.

ability to characterize'.[38] Yet when Burbage 'personated' Hamlet, he was portraying a character who specifically denies all artifice, repudiating 'actions that a man might play' in favour of 'that within which passes show' (I.i.84–85). Jacalyn Royce considers that this means 'the actor (Burbage) must hide the artifice completely and achieve the illusion of not *pretending* to be someone he is not'.[39] This is not quite the case. The audience can perfectly well acknowledge that Burbage, familiar to many of them as a leading actor, is 'pretending' to be Hamlet, but in so doing he must convince them that Hamlet exists, or once existed; that Hamlet is a character who can be personated (potentially, by other actors at other times too). Indeed Hamlet – notoriously opinionated about acting techniques, constantly pondering problems of authenticity, and conscious of the grave consequences of his actions upon the stage of the world – seems only a step away from acknowledging that he occupies a dramatic space and time where he is being observed by an audience wider than the spy network of Elsinore. In the case of roles of this kind, the mutual acknowledgement of actor and audience – with its roots in the clown and the Vice of earlier drama – becomes a trope of the self-aware malcontent figure.

Intertextual references were another metatheatrical technique that drew the audience into continually redefinable relations with the actor performing the malcontent. For example, as noted at the beginning of this chapter, when Vindice appears on the Globe stage holding a skull in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, a striking visual reference to *Hamlet* is created, drawing on rich associations which would be even more piquant if Burbage is again creating the role (and using the same property skull). Generic expectations about both the malcontent and revenge tragedy are set up and then fulfilled or subverted, as will be discussed in Chapter 5; but more than that, a visual symbol such as the skull in Vindice's hand, or a verbal formula that invokes an earlier play, becomes a sign referring to a collective experience and a shared affective history. The nature of the shared emotions evoked by the malcontent will be examined below, in the light of information that can be recovered about early modern psychology of the emotions.

[38] Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage 1574–1642*, p.119.
[39] Royce, 'Early Modern Naturalistic Acting: The Role of the Globe in the Development of Personation', p.479, italics in original.

Emotion in the playhouse

Actors are 'agents of transmission between authors […] and audience'.[40] The reception of the dramatic malcontent is contingent upon emotional as well as intellectual exchange in the playhouse: meanings were created by the communal nature of the experience, and determined by the ways in which the emotions expressed by the malcontent were decoded and understood, how an audience interpreted appeals to its own emotions, and how it responded when experiencing alienation from emotions represented onstage.

Recent research into early modern conceptions of emotion has emphasized the perceived links between mind and body, and the cultural assumptions that led to 'related claims about the effects of the theater: that it is powerfully transformative, that it affects both mind and body'.[41] Scholars have also pointed out that, as is the case with the word 'individual', the term 'emotion' was not available in its modern meaning at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Instead, the 'words that most closely approximated what we call emotion were "passion" and "affection".'[42] Theories about the psychology of emotion were 'highly developed', writes Madeleine Doran, and 'complicated the theory of temperaments, indeed cut straight across it'.[43] Different temperaments were held to be particularly susceptible to different passions or affections (which were variously defined), but every person was to some extent subject to any of them. This was a unifying aspect of human experience, since people of every social degree or humoral type were vulnerable to the power of the passions, and these posed a constant challenge to reason, a more god-like human endowment. Bridget Escolme points out that 'the early modern passions are frequently described as that which makes one less of an individual' – in contrast to the assumptions of modern western culture – precisely because of their threat to self-control.[44]

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[40] Matthew Steggle, *Laughing and Weeping in Early Modern Theatres* (Ashgate, 2007) p.84.
[41] Tanya Pollard, *Drugs and Theater in Early Modern England* (Oxford University Press, 2005) p.18.
[42] Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe and Mary Floyd-Wilson, eds, Introduction to *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004) p.2.
[43] Madeleine Doran, *Endeavors of Art: A Study of Form in Elizabethan Drama* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1954) p.234.
[44] Bridget Escolme, *Emotional Excess on the Shakespearean Stage: Passion's Slaves* (Bloomsbury, 2014) p.xiv.

Nevertheless, emotions were understood to be physiological, both determined by bodily states and capable of inducing physical changes. They influenced, and were influenced by, the bodily humours: 'Passions ingender Humors, and Humors breede Passions', wrote Thomas Wright in 1601.[45] To Wright, the emotions of a vengeful malcontent would neatly illustrate this reciprocal relationship since, according to his taxonomy, melancholy was a passion that engendered a humour, while the anger that might drive the melancholic to revenge was a humour that stirred a passion.[46]

In *Every Man Out of His Humour* (to be discussed in Chapter 7), Ben Jonson's alter ego Asper (about to act the part of the malcontent in his own play) asserts that genuine humours can be distinguished from feigned ones because a humour will control a person's emotions or 'affects': 'when some one peculiar quality / Doth so possess a man that it doth draw / All his affects, his spirits, and his powers / In their confluxions all to run one way: / This may be truly said to be a *humour*.'[47] By contrast, when Hamlet contemplates the engendering of passions – speaking in a similarly metatheatrical context, and likewise concerned with distinguishing the feigned from the genuine – his emphasis is on *external* motivations to powerful emotions. Moreover, he is concerned with consequences: how these passions are expressed in a dramatic performance, and how he should express his own. Observing the actor who, for professional purposes, can convincingly feign a grief he does not feel, emoting 'in a dream of passion', Hamlet asks: 'What would he do / Had he the motive and the cue for passion / That I have? He would drown the stage with tears / And cleave the general ear with horrid speech' (II.ii.554–557).[48] The actor's 'dream of passion' is created purposefully by his reasoning mind, harnessing his imagination and empathy in order to represent the workings of an emotion; in Hamlet's own case, it is his reasoning mind that simultaneously blocks any satisfactory expression of his passions and condemns itself for this obstruction. The result for the audience of *Hamlet* is a surprising perspective on both the struggle between passion and reason, and the relationship between actor and character. It was a commonplace that the passions

[45] Thomas Wright, *The Passions of the Minde in Generall* (Walter Burre, 1604), Book II, Chapter III, p.64.
[46] Noga Arikha, *Passions and Tempers: A History of the Humours* (Perennial, 2008) p.220.
[47] *Every Man Out of His Humour*, Induction 103–107; all quotations from Helen Ostovich, ed., *Every Man Out of His Humour* (Manchester University Press, 2008).
[48] Quoted from the First Folio (1623), Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, eds, *Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623*, Arden edition (Thomson Learning, 2006). See Chapter 4 note 25 (p.108).

should be subordinate to reason, but – as Hamlet's analysis of the Elsinore player's skill and his own dilemma points up – the relationship between the two is complex in the actor's work, and debilitatingly convoluted in Hamlet's quest for vengeance.

The actor whom Hamlet admires is skilled above all in performing a passion, and Tiffany Stern points out that another early modern term for the actor's work was 'passionating'. This was a key criterion for acting, she writes, 'as Hamlet makes clear when he asks the players to perform "a passionate speech" as a way of giving the court "a taste of your quality".'[49] The relevant focus for this study is on what happens when these potentially subversive passions are represented, aroused and released in the playhouse. Hamlet has his own reasons for setting up a test to reveal the effects of the Elsinore players' performance on particular spectators. Meanwhile, Polonius models an inappropriate and theatrically naïve audience reaction, causing a jarring rupture of the illusion –'Look where he has not turned his colour and has tears in's eyes. – Prithee, no more!' (II.ii.457–458).[50] Polonius's frame of reference here is physiological; he takes the traditional view that the player's passions are in a bidirectional causal relationship with bodily processes, and disapproves because both appear out of control. There is no concession to the performative nature of these processes. Nor is there any allusion to the idea, inherited from Aristotle's *Poetics*, that the laughter of comedy and the tears of tragedy could both have therapeutic, purgative effects. For theatregoers more discerning than Polonius, not only is 'passionating' a valued skill, but the release of powerful emotion is central to the dramatic experience. As Marshall puts it, 'excess and extension' and the 'public display of emotion and shared catharsis' are part of the aesthetics of the theatre.[51] Contemporary reports describing theatre performances support this view; Kent Cartwright, citing the example of Thomas Heywood's *An Apology for Actors*, writes that 'Elizabethan commentators on audience experience […] tend to emphasize extreme emotional reactions expressive of group rapport'.[52] John Weever, writing in 1601, describes the

[49] Tiffany Stern, *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan* (Oxford University Press, 2000) p.75.
[50] This foreshadows Hamlet's own intrusive interventions when the players stage their work in III.ii.175–257; Hamlet's focus is of course on the passions aroused in the onstage audience.
[51] Marshall, *The Shattering of the Self*, p.2.
[52] Kent Cartwright, *Shakespearean Tragedy and Its Double: The Rhythms of Audience Response* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991) p.25.

difference in degree of emotional response between reading a poem and experiencing the performance of an actor: 'he may sob which reades, he swound which heares'.[53]

This group rapport depends not only on the power but on the contagion of emotion. In shared light and auditory space, audience members were acutely aware of each other and interpretive communities were developed. Moreover, as Paster, Rowe and Floyd-Wilson point out, spectators were unlikely to regard emotions as primarily private or individual experiences, since 'early modern psychology only partially shares the priority we place on inwardness, alongside very different conceptions of emotions as physical, environmental, and external phenomena'.[54] In a context in which it was understood that the passions were unstable and pervasive, they were felt to be easily communicable throughout the playhouse, and the palpable presence of an audience formed part of a play's meaning. There was what Matthew Steggle calls 'an iterative effect of response to others' responses, whether in the form of laughter or in the form of weeping'.[55] This contagion was felt to have moral and political as well as physiological consequences, and was at the root of the antitheatricalists' fears about the power of drama. Passions on the stage are shown to produce dramatic action; audience response was assumed to be profoundly meaningful, and capable of effecting change.

The malcontent commentator occupies a unique position within the affective domain of this responsive playhouse. Manipulating onstage events, he cultivates ironic detachment from certain passions that are aroused – including those attendant on the horrors he himself may have stirred up, in the case of a Vindice or a Iago – thus generating tension in the spectators' response to these emotive events. He models an ironic distancing from, or even rejection of, certain emotional displays other than his own. While Vindice has a brother, Hippolito, with whom to share his thoughts and plans, a malcontent's true confidant is often the theatre audience: his special relationship with spectators creates a conduit through which other complex emotions are developed and shared, often antithetical to those evoked elsewhere onstage. The malcontent occupies a position that is at once like a playwright's, controlling characters and events, and like a disruptive, opinionated audience member, such as

[53] John Weever, *The Mirror of Martyrs* (William Wood, 1601) sig. F3v.
[54] Paster, Rowe and Floyd-Wilson, eds, *Reading the Early Modern Passions*, p.15.
[55] Steggle, *Laughing and Weeping in Early Modern Theatres*, p.3.

those notorious in early modern theatres for their vocal interventions. Jonson's Asper gives a disapproving description of such a spectator who, significantly, adopts a pose popularly associated with melancholic humours (see Chapter 3); this audience member, hoping 'to be thought one of the judicious / Sits with his arms thus wreathed, his hat pulled here, / Cries mew, and nods, then shakes his empty head'.[56]

It is clear that actors and playwrights needed to be acutely sensitive to currents of emotion in the playhouse, since their livelihoods depended upon making powerful impressions on their audience and tempting them to return. For this reason emotional exchange was a recursive process, and one in which responses on all sides of the theatre were meaningful. Andrew Gurr suggests that audience engagement and detachment from the passions evoked onstage may have varied in different parts of the playhouse: 'the withdrawn position of the richer members of the audience, their removal into the more elevated seating areas confronting the crowd in the yard, may have served as a form of detachment'. Turning to the experience of those standing in the yard, however, Gurr writes that these spectators 'must have dominated the expression of audience feeling' and that 'the yard's reactions to the play would most easily infect the rest of the audience'.[57] The idea of emotional contagion here competes with that of social stratification in the playhouse. Modern reconstructions support the idea of the yard's power; as Charles Whitney comments, 'Experiments at the rebuilt Globe suggest that the yard functioned to develop and radiate energy to players and to other parts of the audience'.[58] It is clear that early modern gallery-sitters would have expected to hold more authority in the formation of judgements about the play (a topic to be discussed later in this chapter), but if the dramatic event achieved sufficient levels of emotional energy, this was likely to be, at least temporarily, a unifying experience. As Siobhan Keenan writes, 'What evidence we have about audience responses tends to emphasize the communal nature of the theatrical experience, contemporaries often describing collective responses'.[59]

The terms 'spectators' and 'audience' are today used interchangeably, but Gurr points out the implications that these two terms encode about the predominant senses

[56] *Every Man Out of His Humour*, Induction 159–161.
[57] Andrew Gurr, 'Why the Globe is Famous' in Richard Dutton, ed., *Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theatre* pp.196, 197.
[58] Whitney, *Early Responses to Renaissance Drama*, p.198.
[59] Keenan, *Acting Companies and their Plays in Shakespeare's London*, p.147.

involved. Gurr concludes that: 'The most congenial and commonplace word between about 1594 and 1640' for the playhouse audience 'was "company".' This perhaps suggests that the experience was best understood as one of communal immersion in the drama rather than the stimulation of particular senses. But Gurr also refers to the prejudice expressed by some playwrights (notably Ben Jonson) against appealing to sight – by which a spectator merely takes in 'shows' – and in favour of hearing, which involves 'understanding'.[60] Clearly, early modern ideas on the functioning of these senses also carry implications for the modes of audience response.

Captivating the senses: Perception and interpretation of the malcontent

The onstage world appeared self-contained, subject to its own rules and logic, and yet by convention any time, place, or action could be depicted (in defiance of the three classical unities). The frame of reference was limited only by the imagination and skill of the playwright and actors. Since the type of material presented to audiences seemed so adaptable, the question of how it was presented and perceived was foregrounded. As noted earlier in this chapter, the actors created or signposted the location of the dramatic events on a relatively unadorned stage, but this fictional space was one they shared with the audience; there was no notional fourth wall dividing players from spectators. The Globe was a purpose-built playing space designed and run by actors, and it was incumbent on them to ensure that every aspect of the audience's experience – what they could see, hear, smell,[61] and at least in their imaginations taste and touch – was meaningful in furthering the drama and the audience's pleasurable involvement in it. As Pauline Kiernan writes, the shared light, the proximity of spectators, and spareness of design meant that the Globe held 'nothing to work on the playgoers' imagination except the story and how it is enacted by the actors'.[62] Indeed, in order to engage regular theatregoers, dramatic skills were

[60] Andrew Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London* (Cambridge University Press, 2004) p.104.
[61] For example, perfume is called for and produced at the opening of Marston's *The Malcontent* to deal with an ominously 'ill-scented' room (I.i.6); all quotations from W. David Kay, ed., *John Marston: The Malcontent*, New Mermaids edition (A&C Black, 1998). Holly Dugan discusses the use of 'olfactory props' in ' "As Dirty as Smithfield and as Stinking Every Whit": The Smell of the Hope Theatre', in Farah Karim-Cooper and Tiffany Stern, eds, *Shakespeare's Theatres and the Effects of Performance* (Bloomsbury, 2013) pp.195–213.
[62] Pauline Kiernan, *Staging Shakespeare at the New Globe* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999) p.11.

required to 'override or reshape the permanent features that playhouses imposed on every production' with their lighting conditions and painted stage architecture.[63]

An oft-cited contemporary description of a successful actor's control of audience attention seems to stress the primacy of the sense of hearing. If you 'sit in a full Theater, and you will thinke you see so many lines drawne from the circumference of so many eares, whiles the *Actor* is the *Center*'.[64] Similarly, in a metatheatrical image in *The Roaring Girl*, a close-packed and attentive audience is described as listening avidly: 'with obsequious ears / Thronged heaps do listen'.[65] Music could no doubt also draw the ears of theatregoers away from their neighbours and towards the stage, effectively creating a sense of place and time and shaping the mood of a scene, as well as focusing attention. Music also suggests character, as is the case with the '*vilest out-of-tune music*' that issues from 'the malcontent Malevole's chamber' at the beginning of Marston's *The Malcontent*.[66] Audiences made their own contribution to the soundscape; Matthew Steggle cites evidence that leads him to conclude: 'audience applause seems likely to have been both especially loud and especially frequent in the early modern playhouse'.[67]

Sight, according to traditions rooted in Aristotle, was the most important of the senses, but it was also 'the potential entry route for evil. It was the means by which men and women fell in love, and the means by which they established a false appearance'.[68] The stage malcontent was typically concerned both with creating a false appearance himself, by means of disguise (as do Vindice, Malevole and even Hamlet with his feigned madness) and with exposing the false appearances of others. Erika Lin cites familiarity with religious rituals such as that of transubstantiation in support of the

[63] Tiffany Stern, ' "This Wide and Universal Theatre": The Theatre as Prop in Shakespeare's Metadrama' in Karim-Cooper and Stern, eds, *Shakespeare's Theatre and the Effects of Performance* p.12.
[64] Overbury, *New and Choise Characters, of seuerall Authors*, 'An excellent Actor', sig. M5v.
[65] *The Roaring Girl* Scene 2, 25–26; quotation from Coppélia Kahn, ed., *The Roaring Girl* in Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino, eds, *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works* (Clarendon Press, 2007).
[66] *The Malcontent*, opening stage direction and I.ii.3–4.
[67] Matthew Steggle, 'Notes towards an analysis of early modern applause', in Craik and Pollard, eds, *Shakespearean Sensations*, p.136.
[68] Jackie Watson, ' "Dove like looks" and "serpents eyes": Staging visual clues and early modern aspiration' in Simon Smith, Jackie Watson and Amy Kenny, eds, *The Senses in Early Modern England, 1558–1660* (Manchester University Press, 2015) p.39.

conventional belief that sight was more easily deceived than hearing; in such rites, symbolic transformations were held to take place in a way invisible to onlookers.[69]

Theatre's appeal to the audience's senses could evoke responses that were experienced as both communal and individual. In *The Culture of Playgoing in Shakespeare's England*, Anthony Dawson and Paul Yachnin debate the mechanisms for each. Dawson contends that 'the audience realized the dramatic truth of the performance by virtue of its communal response'. This analysis suggests spectators keenly aware of the timbre and value of fellow playgoers' responses. Yachnin asserts the primacy of visual stimuli in the theatre, leading to development of an inner, private vision within each spectator which promotes a deeper awareness of character: 'the prevailing visual regimes which jockeyed for dominance in the Elizabethan theatre tended to contribute to the development of internalized, non-material ways of seeing and hence to a view of character as invisible and internal; this worked, concomitantly, to reconfigure the audience as private individuals'. He goes on to argue that 'the pleasure of playgoing […] had more to do with the volatile possibilities of radical individuation than with the experience of sacramentalized collectivity'.[70]

Whatever the pleasures they were experiencing, however, when they were attending to both their fellow spectators and to their own responses, audiences were advised to be on their guard, since the senses were held to be not only unreliable but vulnerable to deception and exploitation. Stephen Gosson, writing in *The Schoole of Abuse* in 1579, condemns drama's appeal to senses that are, he claims, deliberately and perniciously led astray. Performances 'tickle the eare' and 'flatter the sight'.[71] The terms 'tickle' and 'flatter' point to the antitheatricalist view that it is the trivial pleasures offered to the audience that pose the moral danger. The risk in submitting to these pleasures is that they distract the playgoer from more important matters, particularly religious ones.

The malcontent, in sharing his interpretations of onstage events with the audience, appeals to what were traditionally regarded as the three 'internal' senses, as categorized by Thomas Aquinas and rendered as the common sense, the imagination

[69] Erika T. Lin, *Shakespeare and the Materiality of Performance* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) p.63.
[70] Dawson and Yachnin, *The Culture of Playgoing in Shakespeare's England*, pp.3–4, 80.
[71] Stephen Gosson, *The Schoole of Abuse* (Thomas Woodcocke, 1587) sig. C2v.

or fantasy, and the memory. They were held to be superior to the 'external' senses, which could 'only perceive sensations, while the internal senses are necessary to receive those sensations'.[72] Hamlet makes a similar distinction in remarks that superficially appear to privilege theatregoers' hearing over their sight, but are in fact more concerned with the inference of meaning from stimuli received by those senses: 'barren spectators', he says, can make nothing out of events they see, which remain 'inexplicable dumb-shows', while listening to actors who aim to 'split the ears of the groundlings' they perceive only 'noise' (III.ii.10–12, 39). John Webster, lamenting the failure of the first performance at the Red Bull of *The White Devil*, claimed his play missed out on 'that which is the only grace and setting out of a tragedy', that is, 'a full and understanding auditory'.[73]

What is heard and seen must be interpreted satisfactorily or a play will fail. In terms of Aquinas's three 'internal' senses, the malcontent typically appeals to the common sense in his call for accountability and justice, to the imagination or fantasy in his linguistic elaborations and his plotting, and to the memory in his reliance on the audience's experience of drama in general, and its attention to the intricacies of his own plot in particular. This drama is often a self-conscious one; as will be discussed in Chapter 2, the malcontent frequently alludes to the fictionality of the play-world, as one element of his subversive challenge to it. Calling it into question in this way casts doubt upon the reliability of the audience's senses in a wider context. Can they believe what they hear and see outside the playhouse, any more than they can inside it? Paradoxically, the very pertinence of this questioning makes the malcontent's viewpoint more credible and the dilemmas he represents more immediate.

The performance is perceived as an event in itself as well as a narrative of (other) events; the phenomenon of the malcontent's direct or indirect address to the audience calls for the most alert attention and analysis. The actor's use of gesture, including range of movement, posture and the manipulation of props, directs the audience's gaze, delineates physical (as well as emotional) states and may even induce sympathetic physical sensations. This intimate appeal may create an affinity with spectators, but they would be advised to be wary about accepting the truth of the

[72] Aurélie Griffin, 'Love melancholy and the senses in Mary Wroth's work', in Smith, Watson and Kenny, eds, *The Senses in Early Modern England, 1558–1660* p.149.
[73] John Webster, 'To The Reader', 5–6, *The White Devil*, quotation from René Weis, ed., *John Webster: The Duchess of Malfi and Other Plays* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

malcontent's perceptions for a further reason unconnected with the fictions of the theatre: the senses of a person afflicted by melancholic humours were held to be particularly unreliable. In Sir Thomas Overbury's *Characters*, 'A Melancholie Man' is described as typically suffering a disorder of the senses caused by distraction: 'Speake to him, he heares with his eies, eares follow his minde, and that's not at leasure'.[74]

Despite the malcontent's privileged position in the exchanges between the stage world and its spectators, then, his persona as a melancholic creates further complexities of interpretation, since his constitution renders him a defective witness, his senses are confused, and his 'affective perplexity' makes him unable to untangle the reasons for his own discontent.[75] Competing sights and sounds both onstage and around the theatre vie for audience attention, and spectators may resist the malcontent's insistence that they interpret all that they see and hear in accordance with his narratives. Attempting to direct the audience's gaze and insisting that it gives hearing to selected utterances, the malcontent represents a clear risk of misdirection of the senses, so that an ambiguous figure such as Vindice becomes a problematic guide to the dramatic action. The malcontent's persona becomes a site where conflicting and fluctuating perceptions converge. Greenblatt writes of the fluidity of drama in a larger context, noting 'the shifting voices and audiences, with their shifting aesthetic assumptions and historical imperatives, that govern a living theater'.[76] These meaningful shifts are also felt on a smaller scale, in the fluctuations of attention and emphasis by which the audience's senses are directed, or resist direction. There is one 'aesthetic assumption' that is rather more stable, however: the idea – inherited from the Middle Ages – that the stage represented a world, together with the corresponding conceptualization of the human world as a drama observed by heaven. Francis Bacon wrote in 1605: 'But men must know, that in this Theater of Mans life, it is reserved onely for God and Angels to be lookers on'.[77] This extrapolation of the idea of spectatorship promoted audiences' self-consciousness about their position as judges;

[74] Overbury, *New and Choise Characters, of seuerall Authors*, 'A Melancholie Man', sig. D6r.
[75] Mullaney, *The Reformation of Emotions in the Age of Shakespeare*, p.35.
[76] Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*, p.254.
[77] Francis Bacon, *The Two Bookes of Francis Bacon, Of the Proficience and Advancement of Learning, Divine and Humane* (Henrie Tomes, 1605) Book II, 72, Tt2.

the seemingly passive roles of watching and listening in fact implied occupying a moral standpoint analogous to that of a divine judge observing human lives and deeds.

Verisimilitude and judgement

Any audience evaluates a dramatic performance using several different frames of reference. First, theatregoers will consider whether the entertainment meets or exceeds their expectations as paying customers, assessing the quality of theatre facilities, costumes and props and, above all, the skills of actor and playwright. While forming these aesthetic evaluations, audiences are implicitly called upon to make ethical judgements about what is portrayed within the dramatic illusion, such as its social and political contexts and the merits and demerits of characters and actions. Balancing these efforts of assessment and meaning-making necessitates a constant modulation of self-awareness and a willingness to adjust the boundaries of what is perceived as 'reality'.

Playgoers will also – intermittently or otherwise – be aware of the responses of fellow spectators, and recognize that they are part of a temporary community collaborating in the creation of meaning, one of the great pleasures of the theatre. Actors, meanwhile, can see, hear, and attempt to manage the responses of an audience pressing close to them, expressing its judgements through body language, facial expressions or vocalizations. These concurrent reactions will be just as important to the acting company, in shaping its future performances, as the response to the appeal for applause at the end of the play. The quality of the audience's attention will signal a clear difference between moral disapproval of something depicted within the fiction, and aesthetic disapproval of the performance. Differentiating the types of positive audience approval, however, may be a more complex matter. The dramatic malcontent who wins the admiration of spectators through the quality of his (perhaps multi-layered) performance will create the effect of moral complicity in his words and deeds – a topic to be discussed in Chapter 2.

As noted above, playgoers can form both a collective and a set of individuals; this is another distinction blurred by the use of those apparently interchangeable terms 'audience' and 'spectators'. Recent critics have debated the relative merits of conceptualizing theatregoers as individuals or a collective. Charles Whitney points to the community created in the theatre, stating that 'amphitheatre audiences, thanks

partly to their complement of lower social groups, constituted an important social formation opening a unique space for public life in its aesthetic, moral, economic, and political dimensions'.[78] It is clear that, while those sitting in the gallery may have felt they were better qualified than the groundlings to form and express their verdicts, the experience of critical judgement exercised in such a public setting is likely to have had a unifying effect across the theatre. Yet the act of forming an evaluation tends to make a person conscious of exercising individual judgement. Michael Mangan captures this ambiguity of an attentive auditorium with his remark that audiences 'are strange creations, being both wave and particle, individual intelligences and the collective mind'.[79]

One judgement audiences may collectively or individually make is related to verisimilitude: are the scenarios enacted before them lifelike, or alternatively is any divergence from verisimilitude both motivated and earned? In the 1980s, cultural materialist and new historicist critics tended to claim that verisimilitude was not expected in the early modern playhouse, pointing to playing conditions such as the lack of scenery, and anti-naturalistic conventions including the aside and soliloquy. Later critics, examining the sparse record of contemporary responses to performances, concluded there was sufficient evidence that an illusion of reality was both expected and valued.[80] Moreover, it is clear that many of the antitheatricalists' objections to playgoing were founded on the perceived quality of the mimesis achieved in the playhouses; a less-than-convincing performance would have held few of the moral dangers they claimed to identify in the theatrical experience.

The sense that a 'reality' is effectively and engagingly constructed onstage is not, in fact, dependent on scenic or presentational techniques. 'Realism' on the early modern stage depended on the creation of meaning and significance, or as Gurr phrases it, on 'a conviction that the display was a form of truth'.[81] The audience gathered to witness significant actions, and the fact that these were presented in a 'display', manifested through a set of well-known stage conventions and performed by known individuals, was accepted and did not call attention to itself unless deliberately highlighted as an

[78] Whitney, *Early Responses to Renaissance Drama*, p.161.
[79] Michael Mangan, *A Preface to Shakespeare's Comedies, 1594–1603* (Longman, 1996) p.20.
[80] For example, Richard Levin, 'Unthinkable Thoughts in the New Historicizing of English Renaissance Drama', *New Literary History* Vol. 21 No.3, Spring 1990, 433–447.
[81] Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London*, p.135.

enrichment of meaning – as is the case with the varied metatheatrical effects considered later in this study. These techniques heightened the imaginative reach of the drama. Alan C. Dessen notes the existence in medieval drama of 'a revealing gap between theatrical effects linked to imaginative play and game […] and theatrical effects geared to verisimilitude'.[82] In the early modern theatre, this gap is filled by more sophisticated dramatic conventions; many of the 'playful' effects are those of a self-conscious theatricality, and verisimilitude is achieved through a narrative flexibility that enlists the audience in judging events 'as if' they were real.

The appeal (both implicit and explicit) to audience judgement made by the malcontent from his position on the boundaries of the fiction universalizes rather than particularizes the dilemmas he represents, because this appeal relies on linking onstage events to audience experience. The play as a whole, meanwhile, both foregrounds the act of judging and emphasizes the gravity of this act, through its dramatization of the – often calamitous – consequences of errors of judgement. The most pertinent type of error that a drama can present is a failure of spectatorship, where characters misinterpret onstage performances of various kinds (frequently to tragic effect) or misunderstand the nature of performance itself (usually to comic effect). The classic instance of the former is the inset play in *The Spanish Tragedy*, where the onstage spectators complacently assume Hieronimo's drama to be pure fiction, while 'real' murders take place before their eyes. In comedy, misconstruing the nature of performance – or responding to it with either excessive credulity or excessive criticism – is likely to lead to humiliation (as discussed in Part 4). Balancing the cautionary effect of these models of failed spectatorship is the flattering implication that the theatregoers occupy a privileged position in the playhouse, and are in possession of both superior knowledge and superior faculties of discernment compared to characters onstage. The pleasure to be gained from vindicated judgements is bound up with that other reward of the knowledgeable playgoer, the pleasure of dramatic expectations deferred and then fulfilled, or satisfyingly subverted.

Defenders of the theatre (such as Thomas Heywood in his 1612 *Apology for Actors*) claimed that audiences took useful moral instruction alongside their pleasure in seeing virtue rewarded and vice punished, but, as Whitney asks, 'What about unrewarded

[82] Alan C. Dessen, *Recovering Shakespeare's Theatrical Vocabulary* (Cambridge University Press, 1995) p.132.

playgoers who instead surmise that the existing system of parceling out rewards is corrupt, and become positively malcontented?'[83] The theatre clearly had at least the potential to promote this kind of subversion. Justice is the preoccupation of the dramatic malcontent, and its absence is his spur to rail against the world and plot revenge, leading (in a tragedy) to violence and chaos. This raises the problem of responding to the perceived need for a just resolution, which will be discussed in later chapters, but the relevant point here is the way the play positions the audience as both insider and outsider. While emotional and intellectual involvement with issues of justice in the play are required from the playgoer, so is the work of sustaining reliable spectatorship – the ability to bear witness and to form a well-founded judgement, which necessitates a degree of detachment. The ways in which audiences are both intensely engaged with the drama and encouraged to cultivate a productive detachment from it will be discussed in the next chapter.

Audiences attending to early modern performances, then, like all others before and after them, brought into the theatre certain experiences, expectations and cultural assumptions that shaped the types of drama they supported, its methods of presentation, and their reception of it.

Contemporary understandings of subjectivity and the self influenced the way personas such as those of malcontents could be conceived and interpreted. These understandings included contemporary theories about the phenomenon of melancholia, and social and moral norms pertaining to those who rebel against established hierarchies. This chapter has argued that audiences took an aesthetic interest in the complex personality presented, a social interest in observing psychological aspects such as the workings of the melancholic humours within a character, and a moral interest in his actions and his fate. Spectators responding to the challenge of the malcontent, as a microcosm of the challenge represented to orthodox thinking by the theatre itself, were also responding to the variations between the traditional theatrical role and the particular character depicted. On the stage, the abstract was turned into the specific. Ideas about the instability of the self and the plurality of roles one person could play made spectators sensitive to performative aspects of the self, emphasized within the drama by metatheatrical effects and techniques such as the use of disguise.

[83] Whitney, *Early Responses to Renaissance Drama*, p.158.

While it is impossible to reconstruct preferred acting styles, it is clear that an actor's voice, gesture, movement, and costume were the abiding focus on the early modern stage, in the absence of extensive scenery or props. Audiences were in close physical proximity to the players, and many spectators would have been familiar with the work of the most prominent among them in previous productions. Such audiences enjoyed the interplay between actor and role, and contemporary reports on dramatic performances reveal spectators' admiration for acting skills that depicted lifelike characters with whom they could empathize. The ability to perceive both actor and character simultaneously was particularly apt in the case of the malcontent, a role that inherited from its medieval precursors the potential to create a powerful channel of direct communication between audience and actor, and to establish a dynamic commentary upon dramatic events. What is striking about each of the great dramatic malcontents on the early modern stage is their distinctiveness and moral ambiguity, and their use of rhetoric (as well as often startling deeds) to kindle powerful emotional reactions in the playhouse.

This chapter has stressed the importance of emotional as well as intellectual exchange in the theatre, and examined the ways in which its patrons conceptualized the instability and contagion of the emotions aroused by the drama. Early modern ideas about the physiological basis of emotion, the linking of passions and affections to temperament, and the struggle between passion and reason all influenced audience responses – especially those provoked by a malcontent figure cultivating ironic detachment from certain emotions created within the drama while nurturing, and attempting to share, antithetical ones.

The malcontent habitually attempts to direct the audience's gaze, and demands a hearing for selected utterances that further his purposes. In early modern culture, the reliability of the senses was commonly called into question, with warnings that the faculty of sight, in particular, was easily deceived. The malcontent exploits this uneasiness both by drawing attention to false appearances within the play-world (and, by implication, beyond it) and by insisting upon his own use of disguise and deceit as tools of manipulation. This chapter has argued that he also appeals to the audience's 'internal' senses, as categorized by Aquinas, in his attempt to direct their interpretation of external sense data. These fluctuations of attention and emphasis, however, reinforce the understanding that he himself – particularly as one who is

subject to melancholic humours – is an unreliable witness. The problem of forming valid judgements is thus foregrounded.

This chapter has discussed the ways in which the audience as a community, as well as spectators as individuals, use several frames of reference in forming their evaluations. Aesthetic and moral or ethical judgements are continually made in the playhouse, and one of its pleasures lies in its challenges to the faculties of judgement, and their eventual vindication. The consequences of errors of judgement are bracingly dramatized, and failures of spectatorship carry particular resonance. The malcontent's quest for justice often provides a structure for the whole drama, mirroring the audience's desire for a just resolution. As the play unfolds scene by scene, complicating the relations between characters and between the main plot strand and subplots, its meanings emerge. More powerful than the logical sequence of events may be associative effects created by juxtaposition and by the development of symbolism, as will be explored in the next chapter, which is concerned with the self-reflexive workings of the dramatic illusion.

Chapter 2 Uses of the dramatic illusion

'Dost know thy cue?' ponders Vindice, evoking a theatrical sound effect at a pivotal dramatic moment. Bosola, when his revenge plan misfires, laments 'Such a mistake as I have often seen / In a play'.[1] The dramatic illusion casts a particular aura on the malcontent, and he on it, so it is fitting that he frequently alludes to it. This chapter considers the theatricality of the malcontent, and the ways in which dramatic self-consciousness and the workings of stage conventions impacted upon audience reception of this figure. Scholars have coined the terms 'theatrical italics' and 'privileged moments' for those metadramatic effects that create a frisson of special resonance in the theatre. In the development of the malcontent's persona and role, such moments can combine to construct a distinctive perspective that seemingly positions the character both outside and inside the fiction. A figure so placed can generate a close and dynamic relationship with an audience's shifting viewpoints. He can seem to embody the pleasures and potentialities of theatre, including the development of intimacy and self-identification with a skilful and resourceful actor.

As this chapter will discuss, the malcontent's place in theatre tradition – linking as it does to the medieval Vice figure – emphasizes his role as presenter and intermediary. Playwrights typically depict the malcontent as a creator and/or subverter of meaning rather than as one character among several acting out the representation of a narrative or conflict. But the malcontent is not the simulacrum of a playwright and does not create a text; he is a theatrical presence, a performer who expresses meaning by acting out roles and who demonstrates, onstage, that verbal and physical gestures have consequences. The malcontent recruits the *theatrum mundi* metaphor and makes of it an exploration of illusion, whether created by the skilful in the theatre or by the powerful in society at large. The perspectives created by the malcontent's discourses, it will be argued, foreground the place of mimetic realism in the theatre's representation of human affairs, along with the role of symbolism, and the uses of temporal and spatial illusionism. The malcontent's ambiguous presence interrogates the characteristics of the genuine as opposed to the false, the natural as distinct from

[1] *The Revenger's Tragedy* V.iii.43; all quotations from MacDonald P. Jackson, ed., *The Revenger's Tragedy* in Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino, eds, *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works* (Clarendon Press, 2007). *The Duchess of Malfi* V.v.94–95; quotation from René Weis, ed., *John Webster: The Duchess of Malfi and Other Plays* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

the constructed, and the current as contrasted with the historical, in the context of a theatrical illusion that may or may not seek mimetic realism. Marston's *The Malcontent* is of particular relevance in this regard as a play that, by foregrounding Altofronto's manipulation of the dramatic illusion when he adopts the persona of Malevole, affords special status to the eponymous role.

This chapter will investigate the means by which the malcontent both highlights and complicates the business of interpretation, one of the most important tasks and pleasures of the theatre audience. The malcontent typically offers models of spectatorship and prescribes strategies by which moral judgements may be reached. Such techniques are integral to the rhythms of metatheatrical presentation. Differing frames of interpretation are created to match shifts in audience awareness, and debates about the purposes and efficacy of drama are implied by the reactions of onstage audiences, of which the malcontent himself is often a prominent example.

The malcontent's embrace of multiple meanings and roles involves techniques such as overt role-play and the use of disguise – devices of the self-conscious drama which encourage audiences to recognize the mechanisms of their own perceptions. The reliability of language is brought into question by the artfulness of the malcontent's soliloquies, asides and language play. Stage space offers scope for interrogating his metaphorical and literal liminality.

This chapter ends by considering the ways in which the malcontent's palpable presence and metatheatricality shape audience judgement. Many scholars have linked their study of metadramatic effects with an inquiry into the operation of engagement and detachment in audiences, and the ways in which the acts of witnessing and judging are problematized by the experience of metadrama. This is particularly pertinent to the role of the malcontent, who characteristically makes overt demands on an audience to bear witness and offer vindication. The cycle of victimhood, revenge and confession that characterizes many a malcontent's career, combined with his trademark technique of direct address, courts audience complicity, but this close involvement is constantly challenged by complex interplays between the dramatic illusion and metadramatic self-consciousness, which suggest new perspectives.

Metadrama and metatheatre

The term 'metatheatre' was coined by Lionel Abel in 1963.[2] Numerous scholars have since offered their own definitions along with, in many cases, their rationale for differentiating 'metatheatre' from 'metadrama'.[3] In broad terms, metadrama is usually connected with references to texts – such as alluding to earlier plays – and metatheatre is linked to aspects of performance, for example the presence of an onstage audience. There is a danger here of creating a distinction without a difference, however, as it is problematic to draw boundaries between concepts related to texts intended for performance and those that concern (notional) performances grounded in those texts. To cite one of Shakespeare's most famous examples, when an actor playing Polonius performs a brief exchange with the Hamlet actor about his performance of a role in *Julius Caesar*, the rich resonances thereby created are related to the two texts as well as to the actors, stage and theatre-going community.[4] This investigation clearly focuses on performance in the theatre rather than the text in the study, but it uses the terms metatheatre and metadrama interchangeably in order to designate techniques that draw attention to the multiple ways of seeing and judging involved in the dramatic experience, and which modulate audience response in terms of self-awareness, aesthetic distancing or identification.

Abel interpreted metatheatre not as a set of techniques but as a genre in its own right, and specifically one that offered a challenge to classical tragedy. His theory is relevant to contemporary critical inquiry into early modern ideas of the self (discussed in Chapter 1) in that it postulates a theatre culture grown sophisticated enough to reflect upon its own powers and strategies, and to replace earlier ideas of the tragic – which had been more reliant on religious or mythic contexts – with an acknowledgement of the self-conscious, performative aspects of emerging individualism. Abel regarded Hamlet as the first dramatic character to be sceptically

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[2] Lionel Abel, *Metatheatre: A New View of Dramatic Form* (Hill and Wang, 1963).
[3] For example, James Calderwood, *Shakespearean Metadrama* (University of Minnesota Press, 1971) pp.4–5, a definition criticized by Jean-Pierre Maquerlot, 'Playing Within the Play: Towards a Semiotics of Metadrama and Metatheatre' in François Laroque, ed., *The Show Within: Dramatic and Other Insets, English Renaissance Drama (1550–1642)*, Proceedings of the International Conference held in Montpellier, 22–25 Novembre 1990, Vol. I (Publications de Université de Paul-Valéry, 1992) pp.40–42.
[4] *Hamlet* III.ii.94–102; all references to Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, eds, *Hamlet* Second Quarto, Arden edition (Bloomsbury, 2016).

aware of his own performance: here was a personality striving to break out of the confines of his own play.

A very different, but also deeply influential, 1960s approach to early modern theatrical self-consciousness was that of Anne Righter (later Barton). Her concern was with the workings of 'illusion' and 'reality', or 'artifice' and 'authenticity', in the theatre, and with the development of what she termed the 'self-contained play'.[5] This type of drama, she assumed, aimed at mimesis, striving to represent 'reality'. Righter and her followers, perhaps influenced by the preponderance of a 'realist' style in twentieth-century proscenium-arch theatres, assumed that the conditions of early modern performance produced a rather fragile theatrical illusion, which – while earnestly pursued – could also be strategically undermined for comic or other effect. In Righter's view, the plays-within-the-play and theatrical metaphors she catalogued were likely to recall the audience to consciousness that they were in a theatre, thus both calling attention to and breaking the illusion, usually in humorous ways. To Righter, *Hamlet* is a unique example of a tragedy in which Shakespeare addressed topics connected with the contemporary stage in ways that did not endanger its illusionism.[6]

Today, rather than regarding a dramatic performance as a self-contained work of art aiming at realism, we tend to view it as an aesthetic and cultural experience, within which the presence of the audience and the staging context are vital components. Today's audiences are less likely to accept illusion and reality as binary concepts that can be securely differentiated, and any breaking of the stage illusion is not merely an unfortunate or amusing rupture, but a strategy that unifies audience and acting company in the creation of meaning. Not all 1960s critics regarded metatheatre as a means of pointing up the illusory nature of theatrical (and by extension, all human) experience. Sigurd Burckhardt, another influential critic writing in the later part of the decade, viewed such techniques as a means of exploring the moral responsibilities of dramatic art. Burckhardt points out that where a character such as Hamlet or Iago can be interpreted in metadramatic terms as a 'deviser of the plot', the playwright is

[5] Anne Righter (later Barton), *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* (Chatto and Windus, 1962) pp.19, 60, 79 and passim.
[6] Ibid p.159.

foregrounding ethical dilemmas about the creation of tragic outcomes.[7] This plot-driving quality, and the question of moral responsibility, are pertinent aspects of the malcontent figure, as this chapter will explore.

Burckhardt acknowledged that his approach was underpinned by detailed textual analysis rather than attention to the performative aspects of plays.[8] Indeed, theorists of metatheatre have been vulnerable to the charge that this type of criticism 'comes down heavily on performance, but recommends a degree of investigative scrutiny which is more appropriate to the scanning of a text'.[9] Related to the issue of text versus performance is that of author versus audience: critics invariably examine the phenomenon and significance of self-reflexivity from the point of view of the dramatist rather than of spectators. As in Anne Righter's work, the emphasis is often upon a dramatist reflecting on his own art and encouraging his audience to do likewise, rather than adopting an analytical approach that acknowledges such reflexivity as part of the function of spectatorship. Authorial intentions are assumed on the basis of textual evidence, obtained by close reading, partly because historical records of spectator responses are so sparse and methodology for analysing reception is underdeveloped. This study, which examines likely audience response in a particular place and time by working not only from evidence in texts but from research about physical, social and psychological conditions in the playhouse, does not solve these dilemmas but does posit a two-way, dynamic relationship between audiences and the theatre companies (including playwrights) that they favoured. The works that were successfully presented to audiences doubtless both shaped and were shaped by spectators' preferences and levels of understanding. It is also argued that the theatrical presence of the malcontent creates for an audience an experience more wide-ranging than that implied by an expression of authorial self-reflection.

A further disjunction that is characteristic of metatheatrical criticism (but is perhaps less difficult to reconcile) arises from the popularity of the engagement/detachment model pioneered by Maynard Mack in 1963.[10] Seemingly incompatible claims have

[7] Sigurd Burckhardt, *Shakespearean Meanings* (Princeton University Press, 1968) pp.16–17.
[8] Ibid p.vii.
[9] Thomas G. Rosenmeyer, ' "Metatheater": An Essay on Overload', *Arion*, Third Series, Vol. 10 No. 2 (Fall 2002), 87–119, pp.101–102.
[10] Maynard Mack, 'Engagement and Detachment in Shakespeare's Plays' in Richard Hosley, ed., *Essays on Shakespeare and Elizabethan Drama in Honour of Hardin Craig* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963).

arisen from the application of this model. On the one hand it is maintained that reminders of offstage reality serve to distance spectators from the actions and emotions of characters depicted onstage; often this is said to facilitate the achievement of dispassionate judgement, as is claimed for Brechtian alienation effects. On the other hand, particular examples of this awareness of artifice are described as techniques that deepen the perceived reality of the stage illusion, through the workings of contrast, framing, and layering effects. Such an overly schematic view, however, yielded to a more subtle analysis, such as that of Richard Hornby, writing in 1986, who describes the ways in which the two theoretical effects combine in practice. 'The metadramatic experience for the audience is one of unease, a dislocation of perception', he writes. Spectators undergo 'a shift in perception that turns the field of thought inside out. What had been background,' that is, the world as it is outside the theatrical illusion, 'is foregrounded, and vice versa'.[11] More recently, Jeremy Lopez has written that audiences 'enjoyed maintaining an ironic distance from the action or words on stage, and also losing that distance, and then being made aware of moments when they had lost it'.[12] This 'seeing double', as Hornby terms it,[13] is in fact scarcely a new idea, dating back at least to Samuel Johnson's remarks that spectators may be moved by drama while being 'always in their senses' and aware 'that the stage is only a stage, and that the players are only players'.[14] The tendency – implicitly criticized in Johnson's remarks – to underestimate audiences' abilities to distinguish illusion from reality while simultaneously responding fully to the illusion, was not shared by early modern antitheatricalists. Those who condemned the theatre recognized that its subversive power lies in the fact that while its events and characters are clearly counterfeit they are also potent and meaningful, so that when drama portrays power of any description it is revealed to be contingent rather than determined, a performative quality rather than an essential one. In the theatre, fiction is both acknowledged and transcended as a matter of course. As Pauline Kiernan puts it, our characteristic response is 'one in which we believe the fiction, and not, we take the fiction to be

[11] Richard Hornby, *Drama, Metadrama, and Perception* (Bucknell University Press, 1986) p.116.
[12] Jeremy Lopez, *Theatrical Convention and Audience Response in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge University Press, 2003) p.34.
[13] Hornby, *Drama, Metadrama, and Perception*, p.32.
[14] Samuel Johnson, *Preface to Shakespeare* (1765); quotations from Arthur Sherbo, ed., *Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson* Vol. VII, *Johnson on Shakespeare*, (Yale University Press, 1968) p.77.

truth'.[15] Moments of metatheatrical significance occur when an audience's pleasure in this duality is heightened and brought to fuller consciousness.

Alan C. Dessen coined the phrase 'theatrical italics' for those 'moments or images' that 'underscore some effect so as to ensure that a moderately attentive playgoer will recognize that *some*thing of importance is happening'.[16] Erika T. Lin uses the term 'privileged moments' for examples of such a 'jolt or disjunction'.[17] Both phrases are useful in highlighting one of the chief values of metadramatic effects: that they alter the quality of audience attention by foregrounding themes, or interpretative acts. As Tiffany Stern writes, moments of theatrical self-consciousness are not necessarily 'alienating or artful' (as assumed by certain critics), but can be straightforwardly 'proud acknowledgements of staging possibilities', and celebrations of the theatre as 'a prime locus of imaginative power'.[18] As will be discussed later in this study, *The Revenger's Tragedy* is an example of a play in which a highly developed genre relishes its own theatrical ingenuity. When Vindice exults in the irony of being instructed, in his second persona, to murder the persona he created with his first use of disguise (V.i.4–9), the playhouse can unite in celebrating the skills and multiple identities of the actor, as well as comparing the illusory nature of the powers of life and death that are wielded regularly in the theatre with the often arbitrary character of those wielded outside it. Actors and audience can also, perhaps, relish the theatrical echoes of Malevole's situation in *The Malcontent*, when he and Pietro, in their respective disguises, are each instructed to kill the other.[19]

Marston's play interrogates the theatrical illusion and the metadramatic status of the malcontent through its audience's growing understanding of Malevole as a persona carefully crafted by Altofronto. This process of enquiry provides a context within which an audience's response can develop in both depth and intimacy. Malevole, like Vindice, expresses his grim humour from a position both inside and outside multiple

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[15] Pauline Kiernan, *Shakespeare's Theory of Drama* (Cambridge University Press, 1996) p.91.
[16] Alan C. Dessen, *Recovering Shakespeare's Theatrical Vocabulary* (Cambridge University Press, 1995) p.89.
[17] Erika T. Lin, *Shakespeare and the Materiality of Performance* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) pp.23, 68.
[18] Tiffany Stern, ' "This Wide and Universal Theatre": The Theatre as Prop in Shakespeare's Metadrama', in Farah Karim-Cooper and Tiffany Stern, eds, *Shakespeare's Theatres and the Effects of Performance* (Bloomsbury, 2013) pp.14–15.
[19] *The Malcontent*, IV.iii; all quotations from W. David Kay, ed., *John Marston: The Malcontent*, New Mermaids edition (A&C Black, 1998).

layers of fiction, confiding in the audience yet a part of the overarching dramatic illusion, thus becoming a powerful purveyor of the pleasures of the theatre. In both plays, the enjoyment of the type of dramatic irony that arises from privileged knowledge is combined with delight in proximity to skill and ingenuity. Being a member of the theatre audience is theoretically to be in a position like that of the watchful powers of heaven.

Theatrum mundi and dramatic illusion

In the sixteenth century, the ancient metaphor of the world as a theatre, *theatrum mundi*, was deployed for its religious implications by Christian humanists such as Erasmus and Protestant thinkers such as John Calvin, emphasizing a transcendent significance in human actions.[20] Together with its complementary idea that the theatre is a microcosm of the world, it was encoded into the design of early modern playhouses, with their above- and below-stage levels corresponding to the heavens and hell, and the stage itself representing the earth. The very name chosen for the Globe indicates confidence in the idea that the stage could represent humanity in its widest possible context. The complementary image, whereby real lives play out as if on a stage, was clearly felt to be particularly pertinent to late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century London. From Thomas Heywood's introduction to *An Apology for Actors* (1612) to Sir Walter Raleigh, in his poem 'On the Life of Man' (1612) and his Preface to *The History of the World* (1614), the metaphor was well established in contemporary discourse. When John Florio translated Montaigne's essays in 1603, he found the French writer quoting Petronius's *Mundus universus exercet histrionam* and needed little encouragement to accentuate the essayist's use of imagery related to the theatre. His translation is 'a Montaigne theatricalized. Not only at the level of dramatic allusion, but within the very fabric of diction, idiom, metaphor, and argument, Florio renders Montaigne into an English sharply attuned to contemporary interest in stage-plays, spectacle, and the conscious adoption and performance of roles'.[21]

The ubiquity of the stage-as-world paradigm is an indicator that the dramatic illusion achieved coherence and inner logic on the early modern stage. The play-world

[20] Lynda G. Christian, *Theatrum Mundi: The History of an Idea* (Garland, 1987), pp.94–98.
[21] William M. Hamlin, *Montaigne's English Journey: Reading the Essays in Shakespeare's Day* (Oxford University Press, 2013) p.36.

contains all that is necessary for the sharing of meaning; nothing essential is left out, and nothing included within it is irrelevant. Any enigmatic or apparently contradictory elements, or hints at seemingly extraneous matters, can be interpreted as controlled effects contributing to the total theatrical experience. The stage can attempt to represent the world either in a mimetic, naturalistic way, with a 'true-to-life' acting and staging style, or in a presentational manner, in which events or emotions are announced rather than expressed, explained rather than unfolded. In a presentational style, as noted in Chapter 1, naturalism may be shunned in favour of rhetorical formalism, and symbolism becomes an important method of communication. Erika Lin notes that 'Early modern cultural understandings of the interpenetration of the sacred and the profane […] were woven into the semiotics of performance', therefore 'allegorical ways of thinking were so thoroughly integrated into early modern culture that they were not necessarily understood as different in *kind* from mimetic signifiers'.[22] It is clear from the play texts that they require a mixture of both styles, and also that both make a claim to create something afresh, rather than simply re-enacting events that have (notionally) taken place elsewhere and in a different time. Naturalism depicts events and emotions happening in the here and now, as if creating an original experience, while the presentational style, by overtly acknowledging its theatrical context, locates its own origin myth in time and space in front of each particular audience. In each case, the physical presence of the actors and the cogency of their language seem to guarantee substance, currency and validity. The drama's claim to be creating a new set of events is made explicit when historical characters such as Cleopatra, and Julius Caesar's assassins, are shown in a naturalistic way imagining their own future presentation on stage.[23] The theatrical moment is thus endowed with immediacy and significance; such references to the workings of the dramatic illusion become not markers of artificiality or sources of alienation, but signs that in the theatre time and space can be effectively transcended, as well as powerfully delineating the boundaries of a particular performance.

When a type of history is being created on the stage, questions of authorship, authenticity and interpretation are raised. Who is framing the dramatic events, what is

[22] Lin, *Shakespeare and the Materiality of Performance*, p.68.
[23] *Antony and Cleopatra* V.ii.215–220: John Wilders, ed., *Antony and Cleopatra*, Arden edition (Bloomsbury, 1995); *Julius Caesar*, III.i.111–118: David Daniell, ed., *Julius Caesar*, Arden edition (Bloomsbury, 1998).

their relation to the world outside the theatre, and how should they be assessed? Bill Angus argues that such questions coalesce in the development of a particular character type; he claims that from this 'field of interconnections […] an identifiable dramatic figure emerges […] He is an over-empowered audience, the embodiment of the perverse interpretation of the authentic. The manifestation of a fear of misprision, he is melancholic, Machiavellian and malcontented'. Angus characterizes this shadowy and sinister figure as the 'informer', one who is 'the parasitic plotter, the maker of tragedy'.[24] He diagnoses authorial anxiety about, and self-identification with, this malcontented character who, like a playwright, accentuates discord and exposes secrets. Although this notional identification of the playwright with the 'informer' or malcontent figure is appealing, to over-emphasize this approach is to isolate the political implications of the narrative at the expense of the power and creativity of the dramatic illusion. It is also to discount the historical place of the malcontent in theatre tradition. The Vice figure was not representative of an author but of an ethos, and his role, like the malcontent's, was to promote a particular set of significant potentialities in opposition to the (claimed) folly or crime of others.

Both Vice and malcontent favour the presentational style, with their tendency to comment on the action and attempt to direct it. Both characters rely implicitly on the *theatrum mundi* metaphor in their efforts to enlist audience support, and in pointing up the wider significance of onstage events. They also rely on the fact that everything depicted onstage presupposes the existence of a social and moral order against which it can be read, and its language interpreted. This order is not necessarily just, or secure, but it is sufficiently entrenched and stable to constitute an interpretive framework. The malcontent, like the Vice, explores the consequences of the disintegration of such an order, so that 'truth' becomes contestable. He plays with language, where others may see it as representing a system of absolutes and put naïve trust in it; he loves equivocation, irony and innuendo. The stage-as-world metaphor turns, in his hands, into an interrogation of illusion, as created in the theatre and outside it. Yet he also fashions language into a powerful tool for revealing truths. When Altofronto, in role as the malcontent Malevole, speaks in scandalously vitriolic terms, he is also articulating genuine grievances and losses: the special prerogative of the malcontent.

[24] Bill Angus, *Metadrama and the Informer in Shakespeare and Jonson* (Edinburgh University Press, 2016) p.93.

A Malevole or a Vindice, spinning outrageous plots, simultaneously deals in deceit and exposes it in others, and his impenetrable disguises complicate issues of identity and authenticity. Vindice, in his various personas, becomes a Vice-like tempter of his sister, his mother, Lussurioso and the Duke. Illusion and symbolism are tools at the service of a malcontent seeking to battle against the false and the unjust in a hostile environment by using its own methods against it. He explores the boundaries of realism by turning events and characters, and his own malaise, into symbols of larger issues.

Hamlet – as is so often the case – addresses such matters explicitly. At the beginning of the play, Hamlet is in rebellion against both the illusory and the symbolic; he insists on personifying the genuine and unique, 'that within which passes show', in opposition to what a theatre might be capable of: 'forms, moods, shapes' and 'actions that a man might play' (I.ii.82–85). Hamlet's distrust of outward forms is linked to his inability to reach decisions then act upon them purposefully; he can only react impulsively to events. Unlike the classic revenger he focuses inwards. The prospect of taking considered action seems delusional, since all outside of himself appears insubstantial or false, yet at the same time fraught with symbolic meanings that relate to his deepest self. The symbols of his plight, which seem to press around him, each appear to offer an unflattering reflection of his inadequacy as would-be revenger of a father: the player who can effectively express a grief not truly felt, or the soldiers willing to lay down their lives in a trivial cause. But despite the protagonist's own distaste for constructed realities, it belongs to the logic of drama to create such symbols as part of the hero's story, and Hamlet eventually accepts the inherently dramatic nature of his plight by feigning madness, thereby embracing both illusionism and symbolism. By so doing, he imposes his own theatrical metaphor by adopting a persona recalling the then most famous of dramatic revengers, *The Spanish Tragedy*'s Hieronimo.

The malcontent's oppositional pose, by questioning the status quo of the play-world, draws attention to the different workings of mimetic realism, self-conscious theatricality, and symbolism. In *The Malcontent*, for example, Malevole's nature is overtly symbolized by his adopted name and his association with the '*vilest out-of-*

tune music'.[25] His theatricality is acknowledged in his reliance on an impenetrable disguise, and in the soliloquies through which he confides his opinions and purposes. These presentational elements play out against the heightened realism represented by Pietro and his courtiers. A malcontent also co-opts for his own purposes the theatre's license to manipulate time and space. Iago, for example, exploits the dramatic illusion by which constraints of time and geography are no barrier to the possibility of repeated adultery between Desdemona and Cassio, and imposes this illusion upon Othello; Vindice appears to manipulate time by instantly habituating Lussurioso to his service in each of two consecutive personas, and insisting on the speed at which corruption works – 'apace, apace, apace, apace' (II.ii.140) – yet telescoping into irrelevance the previous nine years in which he had been unable to wreak vengeance on the ducal family.

The consequences of the passage of time are always important to the malcontent, since his grievances are related to events that are not only prior to the ones depicted onstage – and therefore 'extradramatic' in temporal terms – but are deliberately obscured, disregarded and/or disputed by other characters. Often, the malcontent is preoccupied with those past events, unseen by spectators, and fashions from them a frame for all subsequent ones, putting pressure on the audience's confidence in his authority as interpreter of these historical occurrences. Their quality of belonging definitively to an extradramatic former time becomes blurred. In the 'present' of the play, ghosts and skulls – such as those associated with Hieronimo, Hamlet, and Vindice – represent the dead and bring their contested stories into the here and now, while usurping rulers such as Pietro and Claudius are forced into conjunction with those they dispossessed in the past and wish to forget in the present. The boundaries of the play seem to expand.

The malcontent, therefore, claims authority of interpretation in accordance with his own frameworks and timescales, and rejects the frames applied by others. True to his metatheatrical nature as a director of the plot, the frames of interpretation that he can control are a microcosm of the larger frames created by the playwright. Marston, in naming his play *The Malcontent*, points up both the dominance of the eponymous character, and his subjection to the playwright's overall design.

[25] *The Malcontent*, opening stage direction.

Frames of interpretation

Framing devices such as prologues and epilogues, or framing scenes that set a story within another story, tend to emphasize the fact that playgoing is a deliberative activity; audiences are not passive witnesses who are present by chance, but have chosen to attend to particular events explicitly set before them for interpretation. Alongside this, framing devices often have other, competing effects: for example, the frame that the figure of Revenge and the ghost of Andrea provide to the action of *The Spanish Tragedy* emphasizes the constraints on the merely human protagonists' capacity for self-determination – indirectly reinforcing the illusion that dramatic characters could possess such a capacity. Each successive dramatic frame, such as Hieronimo's play-within-the-play, obscures the constructed nature of other frames, so that outermost frames are increasingly accepted as 'reality' because of the power of the relatively unpredictable and contingent play-within to command our attention.

Hamlet's most famous metaphor for the functioning of drama describes not a theatrical frame but that which a frame contains and presents, a mirror: the drama, he claims, holds 'the mirror up to Nature' (III.ii.22). In the early modern period, investigations of the laws of optics were published by scientists such as Johannes Kepler, but one did not need to read the latest scientific treatises to be familiar with the fact that a mirror shows a *reversed* image of all that it reflects. If the first mirror effects a reversal, does a second mirror, creating a doubled reversal, restore accuracy and honesty? Metatheatre makes explicit that it is offering not a straightforward reflection of reality but a doubling and tripling of perspectives. A double illusion clearly occurs when a play-within-the-play is presented: the mirror is held up to another mirror. Hamlet's purpose in arranging a performance of 'The Murder of Gonzago' is to expose the truth, but famously the play's scenario –the killing of a king by his nephew – faces in two directions; it not only refers to the past, disturbing the conscience of Claudius by approximating the murderous deed he has committed, but also hints at a future for Hamlet himself, one that is both desired and dreaded. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, the supposed imitations of murder in the performance of 'Soliman and Perseda' become real, in a double reflection. A play-within can also raise the issue of the efficacy of theatrical language, as opposed to action: in *Hamlet*, the dumb-show presented by the players sidesteps words altogether, while Hieronimo's insistence on using languages his audience is unlikely to understand

seems a deliberate ploy not only to sow confusion, but to signal the ambiguities of dramatic speech, before demonstrating the startling efficacy of dramatic action. Actions are eloquent, and less dependent on interpretation; the narrowed focus of the play-within emphasizes the relative simplicity of deeds and gestures, and their significance. In the drama that Hieronimo has caused to be acted, if the actors appear to be dead, it is because they really are dead.

In *The Spanish Tragedy*, not only is Revenge personified as an actor but it is cast as a performance within a performance, and one of particular power and significance. Under the influence of Kyd's play, revenge dramas developed that theme in striking ways. In *The Revenger's Tragedy*, the use of ritualistic masques as cover for murder plots becomes farcical when competing groups of plotters use the same tactic on the same occasion, and one masque encroaches on another's objectives to blackly comic effect. This framing was later developed further at the dénouement of Middleton's *Women Beware Women*, where a circular pattern of mutual revenge is played out in one complex, highly choreographed performance. In *Hamlet* the climactic revenge killings occur not within a masque or play but within an entertainment of a different kind, a demonstration of sporting prowess. However, this anticipates *Women Beware Women* in that it too sets up a circular pattern of mutual killings. When the fencing match is proposed, Hamlet agrees to be put forward as a performer, with his desire for revenge seemingly held in abeyance. But he becomes an unwitting victim of his adversaries' own unsuspected revenge plot. Hamlet was writer, director and onstage audience for 'The Murder of Gonzago', but here Claudius takes on those roles, and as mere performer Hamlet finds his staged fight is corrupted into actual violence. Claudius is helpless as Gertrude becomes an active participant in the performance against his will, by drinking the poison meant for Hamlet. Then he is himself forced to participate as Hamlet breaks the 'fourth wall' of the sporting performance by compelling the most important member of his audience to join in, to fatal effect.

Before Philip Massinger's *The Roman Actor*, with its searching interrogation of audience response and participation, characters acting as onstage audiences rarely provide such alarming images of spectatorship as do Claudius's and Gertrude's self-exposure during the two performances within *Hamlet*. As Bill Angus writes, 'One of the defining characteristics of metadrama is that it foregrounds the drama-audience

relationship in performance',[26] and onstage audiences provide a model against which playhouse spectators can measure their own responses. In comedies (discussed in Part 4), constructive misunderstandings of the dramatic illusion are often exhibited, complementing a display of ineptitude by those attempting to create such an illusion. In tragedies, awe and horror are the reactions that are modelled and therefore reinforced. In both genres, onstage audiences show that theatre works when spectators collaborate in its creative work; they are neither merely hypnotized by it nor wholly passive, detached onlookers. Such audiences are depicted as being changed by what they witness, or conspicuously refusing to be changed, like the miser Philargus in *The Roman Actor*. Unfailingly, they apply whatever they see to themselves and their own concerns (whether consciously or not), sensing a judgement on their own conduct, as does Gertrude when she objects that 'The lady doth protest too much' (III.ii.224). These onstage audiences seem to demonstrate that it is impossible to witness drama without both participating in and being implicated by the acts of judgement that necessarily arise.

Not all inset performances are overtly theatrical. Characters such as Malevole, Vindice, Iago and Bosola perpetrate outrageous deceptions on their antagonists, which are taken to be authentic by their onstage audiences. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, malcontents can demonstrate dangerous persuasiveness, along with palpable contempt for their victims' gullibility: 'Thus credulous fools are caught'.[27] From a privileged vantage point in the playhouse, spectators receive this powerful warning about the dangers of being beguiled, alongside the flattering impression that they are in possession of superior knowledge and discernment – and therefore immune from any such beguilement. In aligning themselves in this way with the wit of the deceiver, spectators find themselves on dubious moral ground as well as in danger of self-deception. These competing messages engender moments of ironic detachment in which different frames of interpretation intersect.

The dramatic malcontent is putting on a performance within the performance, as well as continually observing and judging. A.R. Braunmuller remarks that the advent of malcontent commentators in the playhouse increased the 'layering' of dramatic

[26] Angus, *Metadrama and the Informer in Shakespeare and Jonson*, p.17.
[27] *Othello* IV.i.45; quotation from E.A.J. Honigmann, ed., *Othello*, Arden edition (Bloomsbury, 2016).

dialogue, so that more frequently 'a speaker or speakers describe and evaluate other characters as if they were human specimens and literary types'.[28] He refers to dialogue where two or more characters, especially at the beginnings of plays (the example he gives is *The Duchess of Malfi*) discuss other characters who are yet to appear. Braunmuller's remark suggests that the critical and analytical tone of the malcontent became an integral feature of dramatic vocabulary, as playwrights exploited the power of an intermediary, descriptive layer of discourse – a style that, earlier in this chapter, has been labelled presentational – as part of the dramatic experience. A discussion between two or more persons, even if their value as witnesses is immediately called into question (as for example at the beginning of *Antony & Cleopatra* and of *King Lear*), has a broader effect than the soliloquy of a lone malcontent. It depicts a shared point of view that can be assessed against other evidence. But when the malcontent describes characters, in the light of past events and above all of his own grievances, it is clear that a distinctive and singular perspective is being created, and also that the spectator is being pressed to adopt it, like a co-protagonist. In the opening speech of *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Vindice gives satirical sketches of the character and status of four antagonists in as many lines, then comments ironically: 'Four exc'llent characters', and goes on to expound his personal grievances (I.i.1–5). These wrongs become the focus of audience attention and the prism through which all the action is viewed, although much of it is only tenuously connected with the original sources of Vindice's resentment. Such soliloquies and asides are among the metadramatic devices associated with the malcontent that draw attention to technique, and prompt audiences to recognize the mechanisms of their own understanding and judgement.

Metadramatic devices

As noted above, Braunmuller points to a 'layering' of dialogue that involves reportage rather than dramatization; reportage is a vital technique of the malcontent. When he is describing characters and recounting events, he is in control of both the narrative and his audience. The evaluative tendency that Braunmuller draws attention to is metadramatic in contrast to the direct dramatization of character and events, and can

[28] A.R. Braunmuller, 'The Arts of the Dramatist' in A.R. Braunmuller and Michael Hattaway, eds, *Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge University Press, 2003) p.63.

become so prominent that it tends to replace representative staging, as in George Chapman's *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois*. The distancing effect here, as is the case with Hamlet's repeated contemplations on vengeful action, forms part of a dramatic technique of detachment from the ethos of revenge, a device to be discussed in Chapter 5.

Reportage can be deliberately misleading, offering a false description of events. This usually to leads to black comedy, as in *The Revenger's Tragedy* when Lussurioso spins lies about Vindice's past actions to his (disguised) face, and in *The Atheist's Tragedy* when Fresco elaborates on a supposed attack on him by Sebastian.[29] Witnessing an act of misdirection such as this makes spectators reconsider what they have seen and simultaneously view it through this alternative – though clearly false – prism; they are reminded that while they can seem to have comprehensive access to physical events in the playhouse, they only ever have selective access to the minds represented there. Audiences will attend closely to what they see, but the malcontent's skills in controlling interpretation also include the ability to stage-manage events so that they appear other than they are. This is an extension of his skill with disguises and mistaken identities. Iago can persuade Othello that Cassio is discussing Desdemona, when he is really speaking of Bianca; Vindice can go so far as to make the dead appear alive, first by passing off the skull of Gloriana as 'a country lady, a little bashful' (III.v.133) – with the help of lighting effects, costume and perfumes – then by disguising the dead Duke as a drunken Piato (that is, one of his own personas).

The sequencing of scenes is another method by which the interpretation of staged events is called into question. Comparison and parallelism can encourage audiences to look back and re-evaluate, reframe and revise what they think they have witnessed, and the judgements they have accumulated. Looking forwards, spectators – who enjoy devices such as predictions and foreshadowings that appear to give them a greater understanding than onstage characters – can anticipate outcomes, then be surprised with a different one. This occurs, for example, when Lussurioso – at Vindice's instigation – storms into the Duchess's bedroom expecting (as does the audience) to find Spurio, only to encounter his father. The spectacular error into which Vindice is

[29] *The Revenger's Tragedy* IV.ii.132–157; *The Atheist's Tragedy*, II.v.111–128: Katharine Eisaman Maus, ed., *Four Revenge Tragedies* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

forced here by the exigencies of the plot also distances him from an omniscient authorial identity and emphasizes his theatrical contingency.

Repetition between scenes can also spark changes of meaning, distorting what has been represented so that it becomes alienating, or absurd, such as the entrance of Ambitioso and Supervacuo for a revenge-enacting masque following Vindice's already successful performance of one. The thwarted masque, intended to kill Lussurioso, is in itself a distorted repetition of the scene where Ambitioso and Supervacuo discover that they have incited the execution of their own brother instead of Lussurioso. This time their shock and disorientation result from finding Lussurioso dying, whereas in the former scene they were confounded by finding him alive and well.

The black humour of *The Revenger's Tragedy* is of course enhanced by its self-conscious theatricality. That classic dramatic sound effect in tragedy, thunder, is repeatedly called for by Vindice: 'Is there no thunder left, or is't kept up / In stock for heavier vengeance? There it goes' (IV.ii.197–198). At his killing of Lussurioso, he uses an emphatically theatrical metaphor when the thunder sounds: 'Dost know thy cue, thou big-voiced crier?' (V.iii.43). The comedy of dramatic self-referentiality has the effect of widening viewpoints, and uniting the playhouse in the pleasure of drama's potentialities. Theatre metaphors are powerful on the stage because they illuminate the nature of the shared experience in a particular place at a particular moment, are readily interpreted, and have the effect of bringing the whole dramatic experience both into focus and into context.

Drawing attention to the techniques and conventions of drama constitutes a celebration as well as a critique, therefore. Jeremy Lopez writes that dramatic conventions 'strain and crack under the weight of plots that make utterly free use' of them, with playwrights 'casually acknowledging to their audiences the potential absurdities of their favorite devices, even as they use these devices to more and more hyperbolic ends'.[30] I would argue that while the conventional devices may 'strain' they do not 'crack', but are strengthened by being taken to extremes in a testing way. Vindice's stage business with Gloriana's skull, outrageously surpassing the iconic use of the same prop in *Hamlet*, makes of it a new dramatic character, while his calls for

[30] Lopez, *Theatrical Convention and Audience Response in Early Modern Drama*, p.128.

judgement-signalling thunder (which may or may not have been answered by appropriately staged effects) are an affirmation of the moral principles encoded in theatrical symbols. Moreover, what Lopez terms 'absurdities', pointed up by 'hyperbolic' metadrama, are essential to enjoyment as well as meaning-making in the theatre. Audiences are alive to any ingenious and unexpected application of familiar tropes; the vicarious experience of dramatic power that is embodied in the malcontent is one of the pleasures of engagement with the metatheatrical elements of his role.

Under the well-understood rules of drama, devices such as soliloquies and asides are accepted even within otherwise naturalistic scenarios. We cannot know whether it was usual practice for asides and soliloquies to be directed to particular parts of the early modern playhouse, stratified as it was by social class, but we can assume such speech acts carried great power in the charged atmosphere where the actor's gaze could seem intimate and his physical presence was close. The malcontent typically uses such devices to create audience complicity, and even an unwanted intimacy. Often he indulges in language play, accentuating his power to manipulate meaning and pointing up the slipperiness of language; Hamlet does this in his very first speech, the aside 'A little more than kin, and less than kind' (I.ii.65).

Soliloquies and asides may be differentiated from dialogue by the actor's onstage positioning, his gestures, or the quality of his voice. The actor can choose to deliver them as if audience members are his confidants, or as if in private meditation that happens to be overheard. In each case spectators are placed in the role of mute interlocutors (since there are theatrical taboos forbidding the articulation of verbal replies), but in the former case, where they are addressed directly, they may feel more self-conscious about their responses. Soliloquies and asides, although they are metadramatic in that they draw attention to theatrical technique, are not alien to naturalistic psychology, especially if they are interpreted as reflective thoughts rather than speech. They also appear fitting in a dramatic situation where they can constitute a form of dialogue between different aspects of one character's mind. It is demonstrated in several plays that soliloquizing speech can be interpreted as natural behaviour by other characters yet additionally understood by the audience as a theatrical trope. In tragedies, characters speaking aside can occasionally be observed by others and their temporary detachment noted: Lussurioso asks Vindice 'Why dost walk aside?' (I.iii.128), and Banquo exclaims of Macbeth 'Look how our partner's

rapt' and then, as he continues to speak aside, addresses him: 'Worthy Macbeth, we stay upon your leisure'.[31] In the case of Vindice, this can be taken as another example of the play's self-conscious stretching of dramatic techniques. With Macbeth, the opposite seems to apply; the fact that Macbeth can be observed speaking aside by other characters seems appropriate since he is left exposed by his terrifying *lack* of dramatic self-awareness.[32] We overhear Macbeth laying bare his thoughts in a disturbing way, rather than gaining the impression that he confides in us. This is a mirror image of the way in which he tends to expose his profoundest thoughts and emotions in dialogue where he is intending to protect himself with lies (such as when he expresses his horror at the murder of Duncan, or wishes that Banquo could attend the feast). In comedies, speaking aside or in soliloquy more often carries the danger of being overheard, or misheard, by those onstage (the most egregious example of overhearing being Malvolio's in *Twelfth Night*, discussed in Part 4). In either case, onstage audiences offer a model of attending to others well or badly, and reading or misreading the clues on offer.

One dramatic convention that mandates a complete absence of clues is the impenetrable disguise. The complex effects of role-playing and its associated suggestions of non-integrity are discussed in Chapter 6, but here it is appropriate to note that disguise may call attention to costume, props and scene changes, as well as to the actor's skill. Closely related to disguise is the theatrical practice of the doubling of roles, which draws attention to some of the same elements of the theatrical experience, and likewise calls on dramatic convention to aid audience comprehension. Critics such as Stephen Booth have speculated about the way the practice of doubling can throw light on character and theme, such as the effects (discussed in Chapter 8) of doubling in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Booth also makes the important point that 'double identities […] are the mainsprings of delight in all theatrical productions and most theatrical plots'. The experience of spectators who perceive that an actor is doubling roles can become a compressed version of that which occurs when a familiar

[31] *Macbeth*, I.iii.145, 151; all quotations from Sandra Clark and Pamela Mason, eds, *Macbeth*, Arden edition (Bloomsbury, 2015).

[32] Macbeth is at once a horrified spectator (of Banquo's ghost, the witches, and even his own deeds); an inept performer of the role of king and host (in the banquet scene he will 'play the humble host', III.iv.4, but is jolted out of his part); and an out-of-control actor – 'Strange things I have in head, that will to hand, / Which must be acted, ere they may be scanned' (III.iv.137–138). This culminates in his description of 'life', rather than himself, as an ineffectual 'poor player, / That struts and frets' (V.v.23–24).

actor takes a role in a new play, such as Richard Burbage perhaps acting Hamlet, then Malevole, then Vindice. As Booth puts it, audience members will take pleasure in 'imperfectly blurred distinctions', for example those between actor and character, or fact and fiction. They are invited to 'revel in the theatricality of theater'.[33]

When actors are either doubling a role or portraying a character using disguise, they can be described as being in a liminal state; the act of performing is emphasized and their presence both as actor and character is acknowledged. Liminality is a potentially productive state on the margin between two conditions, neither completely one nor the other, but perhaps partaking of both. This state is of course characteristic of the malcontent, whether in disguise or not, because of his position as commentator. He is socially or politically marginalized, and his liminality also suggests urgency, since his ability to maintain a position on the edge of a society or situation is likely to be temporary.

Critical attention has been paid to the positioning on the stage of a commentating figure such as the malcontent, who is likely to be portrayed as physically marginalized. Writing in the 1960s, J.L. Styan considered that a downstage position, close to the audience, developed an intimate relationship with spectators and also created neutral ground, so that a player upstage becomes absorbed into the scene but 'release from the action allows him to become in part a spectator himself, bringing him downstage to be in touch with his audience. It follows that the foot of the platform is sometimes used as neutral ground that is even less localized than the acting area nearer the façade of the tiring-house'.[34] More recently, Robert Weimann's theory of *locus* and *platea* has become influential in the analysis of early modern staging. The *locus* is the fixed position, relatively distant from the audience, in which symbolic places and actions can be created. The *platea* is close to the audience, and represents the 'theatrical dimension of real world'.[35] Weimann and Douglas Bruster link the Vice character with the *platea* position, 'from which he never quite withdraws in the course of the play. This positioning offers him a unique, double-voiced frame of reference'. As he

[33] Stephen Booth, 'Speculations on Doubling in Shakespeare's Plays' in Philip C. McGuire and David A. Samuelson, eds, *Shakespeare: The Theatrical Dimension* (AMS Press, 1979) pp.103, 113, 127.
[34] J.L. Styan, *Shakespeare's Stagecraft* (Cambridge University Press, 1967) p.94.
[35] Robert Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater: Studies in the Social Dimension of Dramatic Form and Function* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978) p.76.

moves between *locus* and *platea*, this type of character combines 'in one figure, presentational and representational modes of rendering'.[36]

Erika Lin develops Weimann's theory, commenting that for historicist scholars, 'the *platea* embodies the subversive potential of popular performance', which is an important feature of the malcontent's role. In analysing the qualities that differentiate *locus* from *platea*, Lin relies on metatheatrical elements, which (as noted above) she terms theatrically 'privileged' moments: it is not simply being watched that places a character in the *locus*, but 'rather being watched or heard *unawares*'. She goes on: 'the more characters are aware of the playhouse conventions through which visual, aural, and verbal cues on stage come to signify within the represented fiction, the more they are in the *platea*'.[37] This is a useful formulation, and illuminates the difference between Macbeth and a figure such as Hamlet or Vindice; Macbeth's lack of dramatic self-awareness, mentioned above, disqualifies him from fully inhabiting the *platea* position, whereas Hamlet and Vindice seem to be in almost permanent occupation of it, and thus to become representative of what Lin terms 'the subversive potential' of the theatre itself.

The quality of spectators' attention, and their experience as witnesses of the action, are different when they feel they have access to the malcontent's mind and can see their judgements reflected (or distorted) there. The final section of this chapter looks at the metadramatic aspects of an audience's experience of evaluating what they witness in the playhouse.

Spectators as witnesses and judges

The dramatic malcontent requires not a passive audience but one that will act as witnesses, admire his skills, sympathize with his aims and give implicit consent to his actions. Protagonists such as Hamlet or Bosola may make their most explicit appeals for such responses only in their dying speeches, but acts of observation and judgement acquire resonance because an appeal to them is built into the structure of the drama. Modelling the responses he desires by continually expressing judgements about other characters and actions, the malcontent claims the status of witness and moral arbiter for himself, appearing to occupy (as discussed in Chapter 1) a vantage point both

[36] Robert Weimann and Douglas Bruster, *Shakespeare and the Power of Performance: Stage and Page in the Elizabethan Theatre* (Cambridge University Press, 2008) pp.39, 62.
[37] Lin, *Shakespeare and the Materiality of Performance*, pp.24, 32, 34.

inside and outside the play-world. His position inside it is important because, as Bert O. States puts it, 'we want the play to contain an audience to its own act'. When using this phrase, States is referring to 'the chorus of saddened survivors at the end' of a tragedy, whose reactions place events in their social context.[38] But providing the play with 'an audience to its own act' is a role fulfilled somewhat more powerfully and challengingly by the malcontent revenger endeavouring to enforce his own ideas of justice and also to control interpretation. His prominence militates against the mediating effect of the multiple viewpoints that are usual in the theatre.

Kent Cartwright makes an argument similar to States' point about the importance to the tragic dénouement of the act of witnessing, but expresses it in different terms: 'Tragic closure depends for its full power on, unexpectedly, the audience's consciousness of theatricality'.[39] Presumably, Cartwright finds it 'unexpected' that dramatic self-consciousness is required in order for the tragic dénouement to be experienced as authentic and powerful; but it is here, in fact, that the performative power of the malcontent is most apposite. The masque, playlet or other entertainment that is often a frame for decisive action – and emphasizes the significance of an onstage audience – magnifies the drama of the dénouement. In the theatre, an action or speech act represents more than just itself because, as Simon Palfrey puts it, in 'the synecdochal economy of theatre, […] one thing stands for an extended series'.[40] All performances point to something bigger than themselves, as the *theatrum mundi* metaphor affirms. Inset performances and self-conscious theatricality, therefore, multiply the dramatic power of climactic moments.

It was remarked in Chapter 1 that the playhouse audience is perfectly capable not only of distinguishing between the actor and the character he performs, but of observing both simultaneously. A similar relationship exists between the performative aspects of the malcontent – those that establish close contact with the audience in the *platea* – and his more 'natural' persona, which is vulnerable to the slings and arrows of the *locus*. The appeal of powerful acting is strong, and commands attention in itself, as is modelled in the plays: Mistress Quickly praises Falstaff for being like a professional

[38] Bert O. States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of the Theater* (University of California Press, 1985) p.172.
[39] Kent Cartwright, *Shakespearean Tragedy and Its Double: The Rhythms of Audience Response* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991) p.6.
[40] Simon Palfrey, *Shakespeare's Possible Worlds* (Cambridge University Press, 2014) p.257.

actor, rather than like the king he is impersonating,[41] and Hamlet identifies with the actor who is expressing grief, not with the character who is notionally feeling it ('What's Hecuba to him, or he to her, / That he should weep for her?', II.ii.494–495). But just as the audience sees the character through the performer and responds to – even identifies with – that character as a genuine site of subjectivity, so it looks through the malcontent's metatheatrical pose to the persona that is driving it. The result is to powerfully reinforce spectators' sense of complicity.

An audience that is privy to the malcontent's motivations, witnesses his deeds, and is under the influence of his interpretation of events is exposed to a share of his responsibility; at the very least, part of the spectators' role as witnesses is to imagine and explore this burden of responsibility. That audiences were morally complicit in what was shown onstage was an important line of argument for the antitheatricalists. Playgoers were condemned in these terms: 'For while they saie nought, but gladlie looke on, they al by sight and assent be actors'.[42] Authority and culpability in the playhouse seemed dangerously fluid, and understanding of these issues was bound up with early modern ideas about the communicability of the passions, as discussed in Chapter 1. Passions aroused in the audience are not usually expressed by intervening in what is depicted on stage, but may find an outlet in a perception of complicity, especially if coupled with feelings of powerlessness. Simon Palfrey suggests that 'perhaps it is just this remission from self-responsibility, permitted by our impotent attendance, which brings responsibilities newly home'.[43]

For Simon Trussler, the balance of responsibility between audience and stage works to emphasize spectators' duty to form judgements. Discussing the ending to *The Malcontent*, Trussler writes: 'self-aware theatre tends to work best as *dialectic* rather than demonstration, leaving the business of drawing moral conclusions to the audience'; he concludes that Marston is challenging the audience to make the effort of judging.[44] The malcontent revenger, however, tends not to attempt to evade moral responsibility, but rather to welcome it, and his challenge to the audience lies in the

[41] *I Henry IV*, II.iv.385–386: David Scott Kastan, ed., *I Henry IV*, Arden edition (Bloomsbury, 2002).
[42] *A Second and Third Blast of Retrait from Plaies and Theaters*, attributed to Anthony Munday (Henrie Denham, 1580) p.3.
[43] Palfrey, *Shakespeare's Possible Worlds* p.294.
[44] Simon Trussler, ed., *John Marston: The Malcontent* (Methuen, 1987) pp.xli, xlii, italics in original.

way he uses his own confession to magnify his settling of scores. The artificiality of the masque or other entertainment that may be used to frame the act of revenge has a formality that seems to usher in ritualistic confessions. In the model for such tragic dénouements provided by *The Spanish Tragedy*, Hieronimo first freely confesses and exults in his revenge, then refuses to speak under duress, thus satisfying the audience with full disclosure while also preserving indeterminacy, and refusing to acknowledge limits to the significance of his actions. When at the dénouement of *Othello* Iago refuses to confess or to account for his actions, the effect he achieves is – as throughout the play – to cast Othello himself in the role of revenger, and to highlight the Moor's own confessional speeches.

As Othello's final speeches demonstrate, confession and explanation tend to distinguish revenge from plain murder. *The Revenger's Tragedy* satirizes this generic tradition. Vindice's boastful ''Twas somewhat witty-carried' seems to anticipate a genre-bendingly tragicomic ending to the play, where the 'just' revengers will triumph, but this is quickly turned on its head. 'Thou hast no conscience', Vindice cries as he is condemned; but when he ruefully points out that folk wisdom is correct in asserting that murderers always themselves reveal their murders, he is ceding the moral high ground of the revenger by explicitly characterizing his acts as 'murder' (V.iii.97–118). This admission may be a satirical signal – in this most self-consciously theatrical of plays – that the necessary moment for the audience to disengage from Vindice has arrived. The process of detachment from a doomed tragic protagonist is in practice a more subtle and complex process.[45] Kent Cartwright claims that: 'In the economics of dramatic distance, one compensation for the audience's gradual detachment from the dying hero is its engagement with the triumphs of the performance'.[46] But in the case of the metadramatic malcontent, the triumphant performance – at least at the level of the plot – is also his own creation; engagement with this performative aspect of the malcontent is not nullified at the dénouement, but made more complex. At the outset of his revenge plot, Vindice had claimed that he and his brother were forced to become 'innocent villains' (I.iii.170),

[45] Robert C. Jones, offering a moral reading, traces developing patterns of engagement and detachment in relation to characters he terms 'knaves' in *Engagement with Knavery: Point of View in Richard III, The Jew of Malta, Volpone, and the Revenger's Tragedy* (Duke University Press, 1986).
[46] Cartwright, *Shakespearean Tragedy and Its Double*, p.14.

and it is impossible for an audience that has witnessed his progress towards becoming less innocent in villainy to adopt Antonio's irony-free viewpoint about Vindice's wickedness, or to be unmoved by his wittily expressed sense of vindication.

As noted early in this chapter, when critics discuss engagement and detachment it is often in terms of an audience's ability to form judgements, and they usually assume that for evaluation to take place, a certain level of detachment is necessary. Yet they also acknowledge that, in order for tragic effects to be achieved, the staged illusion must be profoundly convincing and involving. The dénouement necessarily brings an alteration of perspective that defamiliarizes and displaces actions and characters so that they become amenable to critical analysis, although this falls far short of the level of alienation championed by Bertolt Brecht in twentieth-century theatre (in the cause of enabling audiences to make judgements that were not politically and ideologically predetermined). Brecht's fascination with early modern tragedy[47] led to his adaptation of *The Duchess of Malfi* in the 1940s. In Brecht's version the role of the malcontent Bosola is much diminished; he is turned into a mere dupe of the unscrupulous and ambitious characters, and the result is indeed the lack of engagement that Brecht desired.[48]

In early modern tragedy, however, contrasts in modes of response – such as that between fascination and horror, engagement with a performance and detachment from a protagonist – are keenly felt.[49] A malcontent figure is able to both insist on audience judgement and transcend it; tensions in the patterns of audience engagement and detachment create the effect of collaboration across the playhouse in the creation of meaning, while his performance-within-the-performance complicates ideas of authenticity and responsibility. Through the multiple perspectives offered by the malcontent, spectators are empowered to connect their dramatic experience with their knowledge of the wider world.

This chapter has discussed the ways in which the dramatic illusion resonates with the malcontent's persona as a skilled and resourceful performer. The *theatrum mundi*

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[47] Discussed by Jonathan Dollimore in *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) pp.63–69.
[48] *The Duchess of Malfi* in John Willett, ed., *Bertolt Brecht: Collected Plays*, Vol. 7 (Bloomsbury, 2006).
[49] This is particularly the case where there is graphic stage violence; the violence of the revenger will be discussed in Chapter 6.

metaphor is essential to the malcontent's manipulation of illusion, and his interrogation of the nature of authenticity. Metadramatic devices that are at the service of playwrights depicting malcontent personas may be related to language, such as soliloquies and asides, or to action, such as the use of disguise to raise questions of identity, and use of stage space to create effects of liminality, involvement or distance. Such devices may create a special status for the metadramatic malcontent in terms of the intimacy and intensity of audience response, and they serve to emphasize the performative nature of power and judgement. The different frames of interpretation offered by the overall performance and, as a metadramatic manipulator, by the malcontent himself, create shifts in levels of awareness for the playhouse audience, contributing to the shaping of spectators' judgement and highlighting the implications of bearing witness.

The two chapters in the first section of this study have placed the malcontent in the context of the early modern stage, examining contemporary understanding of concepts such as subjectivity, the playing of roles, and the functions of drama. It has been argued that the physical and social conditions of spectatorship promoted a certain self-consciousness about the role of the audience, which was both cause and effect of the prominence of metadramatic elements such as those examined in this chapter.

The second section will examine the emergence and development of some essential characteristics of the malcontent figure, beginning with a consideration of the early modern concept of melancholia, the 'humour' most closely associated with the malcontent. The next chapter, therefore, considers the relationship between the stage malcontent and the melancholic, and looks at the cluster of ideas connected with melancholia that early modern audiences were likely to bring with them into the theatre.

Part 2 Melancholia and the malcontent

Chapter 3 The shared iconography of melancholia

The dramatic malcontents discussed in this study share one important feature: they are closely associated with the early modern concept of melancholia. The label 'melancholic' became a familiar one to describe a person displaying certain definable characteristics, or under the influence of particular life experiences – although, as will be discussed below, it was applied almost exclusively to the male and the relatively privileged. This chapter examines early modern images of and ideas about melancholia, and the ways in which they contributed to concepts of the malcontent, thus helping to shape dramatic transactions between these characters and their audiences.

According to many scholars, social and political conditions in the early modern period – such as widening education combined with economic dislocation, resulting in lack of employment for educated young men – paved the way for the rise of the melancholic type. Melancholia often shaded into political dissent, with subversive potential in satire and in stage presentations of the malcontent. Critical commentaries on the depiction of the melancholic type in literature, and in particular dramatic literature, emphasize the importance of the verse satires of Marston as a source for tropes related to the malcontent. The satiric model is considered in this chapter alongside dramatic malcontents motivated by deeply held social grievances, such as Webster's Bosola and Flamineo. The question of genre is also significant here, since melancholia may be presented as a comic rather than (or as well as) a tragic effect.

While social and experiential causes of melancholia were acknowledged, theories about bodily humours and their physiological effects were held to be fundamental to the understanding of melancholia, and to any hope of a cure. Hypotheses about the workings of the humours led to competing models of the ways in which melancholia might manifest itself, so that pseudo-scientific concepts entered popular imagination in varied and flexible guises. The responses of other characters to malcontents reflect the diverse ways of understanding and interpreting melancholia, as well as serving to reveal much about the society depicted in each play. Analysis of the status accorded to the melancholic is a useful means of assessing the significance attached to such characters.

This enquiry into the connections between the cultural concept of melancholia and the presentation and reception of the malcontent develops links between the melancholic, the stage malcontent and the dramatic revenger, a powerfully influential nexus for early modern drama. The theatricality of the ways in which melancholia was believed to manifest itself, and the emphasis it placed on the troubled relationship between contemplation and action, were significant elements in the characterization of dramatic malcontents. The chapter ends with a consideration of the workings of the melancholia trope in the most famous and influential revenge protagonist, Hamlet.

Early modern imagery of melancholia

The experience of melancholy or grief must find expression if it is to have cultural or social value; Hamlet both ruminates upon and demonstrates this principle. In the theatre, as well as outside, if some outcome such as restitution or revenge is determined upon, it must issue in action. Hamlet is introduced to the audience wearing black, at the heart of a court that has cast aside mourning in order to celebrate a wedding and the accession of a new ruler. His first words are a riddling aside. Both his appearance and his words encourage an audience to read his character in terms of contemporary images of melancholy and of the dramatic malcontent. In the popular imagination the melancholic was a figure in black clothes, usually with a hat pulled down over the eyes, a withdrawn aspect and body language such as folded arms and downcast gaze. This formula was held to be old-fashioned as early as the 1590s, having already passed into notoriety in the guise of the stage malcontent. Edward Guilpin used a suitably theatrical image in this 1598 description of one type observed in the city:

One like the vnfrequented Theater
Walkes in darke silence, and vast solitude,
Suited to those blacke fancies which intrude,
Vpon possession of his troubled breast:
But for blacks sake he would looke like a ieast,
For hee's cleane out of fashion: what he? […]
Would you needs know? he is a malecontent.[1]

As for 'young *Pansa*', this 'mighty malcontent', 'if he be so mad to walke the streetes, / To his sights life, his hat becomes a toombe'.[2] Shakespeare, too, uses an

[1] Edward Guilpin, *Skialetheia. Or, A shadowe of Truth, in certaine Epigrams and Satyres* (Nicholas Ling, 1598) *Satyra Quinta*, sig. D6r.
[2] Guilpin, *Skialetheia*, Epigrams: 'Of Pansa' 52, sig. B4r.

image of this type in the 1590s: in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Valentine is accused of having 'learned […] to wreathe your arms, like a malcontent'.[3] The melancholic's fondness for black clothes has been attributed not only to the negative emotions associated with that 'nighted colour',[4] but to the fact that travellers – said to be particularly susceptible to melancholy, as will be discussed below – were thought to mimic a fashion for black clothes originating in Florence and Venice.[5] Black cloth had historically been expensive to manufacture, 'a mark therefore of social distinction', but paradoxically was also connected with humility and religious piety, so that a man wearing black 'can sidestep the social staircase because he seems to take his stand on a moral stair instead, and indeed to take the high ground precisely through humility'.[6]

As late as the 1630s, the dramatic associations of this type of clothing and behaviour were still current enough for William Heminges to feel able to characterize the playwright John Ford with a transferred epithet: 'Deep in a dumpe Jacke forde alone was got / With folded Armes and Melancholye hatt'.[7] Richard Brathwaite, in describing a discontented 'Gamester', could refer directly to the dress and gestures of a well-known dramatic character dating from the beginning of the century: 'Suppose him then walking like a second *Malevolo* with a dejected eye, a broad-brim'd hat or'e-pentising his discontented looke, an enwreathed arme like a dispassionate Lover'.[8]

Clearly, there were well-established outward signs of melancholia, yet a tension existed between the generally accepted biological derivation of the condition and the understanding that it was an emotional state or passion, and could be caused by life experiences such as unrequited love, returning from travels, or devoting oneself to scholarliness. For a dramatic character to exhibit signs of melancholia was to invite audience curiosity about the passions that he harbours and will express in the drama.

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[3] *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* II.i.17–18; quotation from William Carroll, ed., *The Two Gentleman of Verona*, Arden edition (Bloomsbury, 2004).
[4] *Hamlet* I.ii.68; all quotations from Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, eds, *Hamlet* Second Quarto, Arden edition (Bloomsbury, 2016).
[5] Z.S. Fink, 'Jaques and the Malcontent Traveler', *Philological Quarterly* 14 (October 1935), 237–252, pp.240–241.
[6] John Harvey, *Men in Black* (Reaktion Books, 1995) pp.55, 65.
[7] 'Elegy on Randolph's Finger' (c.1632), lines 81–82: Carol A. Morley, ed., *The Plays and Poems of William Heminge* (Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2006) p.418.
[8] Richard Brathwaite, *Whimzies: Or, a New Cast of Characters* (Felix Kingston, 1631) 7: A Gamester, p.56.

As discussed in Chapter 1, emotions were understood to be volatile within the playhouse, as well as unstable in their relation to humours such as melancholy: it was reasonable to wonder whether the passions on display would be excessive, or even transgressive.

Theories about the humours, the varieties of human temperaments, and possible interactions between the two had created several paradoxes in attitudes towards melancholia, helping to create the 'complex meanings and associations' that early modern playwrights were able to draw upon, since 'Melancholy was classified as a disease, condemned as a vice, or exalted as the condition and symptom of genius'.[9] It was a potentially subversive force in matters of religion and politics. It could be associated with a sufferer's unfortunate circumstances, or apparently be without motive as in Antonio's opening line to *The Merchant of Venice*: 'In sooth I know not why I am so sad'.[10] It was also a fashionable affectation, so the melancholic disposition could be directly challenged, even by well-wishers: Gratiano warns Antonio not to seek by his sad silence to be 'reputed wise', to 'fish not with this melancholy bait / For this fool gudgeon, this opinion' (I.i.96, 101–102).

Lawrence Babb, in his influential exploration of early modern melancholia, traces the source of these contradictions to the difference between Aristotelian and Galenic traditions.[11] The former associated the melancholic state with eminent thinkers, in whom it could promote both intellectual powers and creativity. Galen's theories, on the other hand, stressed the ways in which imbalances of humours produced diseased states, and this led to the classification of melancholy as a pathology resulting in delusions and negative behaviour. This in turn became entangled with moral ideas about the sinful nature of the passions.[12] While Timothie Bright's 1586 *Treatise of Melancholie* emphasizes humoral imbalances in its examination of possible causes and cures of melancholia, Robert Burton's expansive *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) considers wider contexts and describes it as 'a common infirmitie of Body and

[9] Bridget Gellert Lyons, *Voices of Melancholy: Studies in Literary Treatments of Melancholy in Renaissance England* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971) p.1.
[10] John Drakakis, ed., *The Merchant of Venice*, Arden edition (Bloomsbury, 2011); all quotations are from this edition.
[11] Lawrence Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady: A Study of Melancholia in English Literature from 1580 to 1642* (Michigan State College Press, 1951) pp.66, 175.
[12] Lyons, *Voices of Melancholy*, p.5.

Soule, and such a one as hath as much need of a Spiritual as a corporall cure'.[13] Thus melancholics could be advised to find a cure by eating certain foods in order to correct physiological imbalances, or to improve their state of mind by going to see a comic play (as discussed in Chapter 7), while simultaneously being vulnerable to a charge of moral or spiritual deficiency. Analogies between the health of the realm (the body politic) and the health of the individual could lead to the characterization of political or religious dissent as a pathology caused by mental or physiological imbalances. Melancholia was by definition inimical to harmony and stability, and 'Discord to malcontents is very manna', according to Marston's Malevole.[14]

Twentieth-century critics recognized that ideas about melancholy were an important influence on early modern literature, and (as noted in the Introduction) categorized Elizabethan melancholia in varying ways.[15] Types usually cited are love melancholics, scholarly or intellectual melancholics, cynical or scheming melancholics, and travellers: Babb regards 'the Italianate traveller' as a principal influence on the understanding of melancholy in both 'life and literature', and claims this figure is the original source of the melancholy malcontent.[16] Travellers were thought likely to become discontented with their own country, and especially with the amount of favour or patronage they received on their return; they were also liable to be infected with foreign customs, and with potentially dissentious political and religious ideas.[17]

As Madeleine Doran writes, the multiplying causes, types and symptoms of melancholy were 'all a gain from the dramatic point of view, as the varied gallery of melancholic characters, from Jaques to Bosola, shows'.[18] The variant forms of the humour could be depicted in a character who took the shape of a Machiavel, of a

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[13] Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Henry Cripps, 1621), 'Democritus Junior to the Reader', pp.12–13.
[14] *The Malcontent* I.iv.38; all quotations from W. David Kay, ed., *John Marston: The Malcontent*, New Mermaids edition (A&C Black, 1998).
[15] For example, G.B. Harrison, 'On Elizabethan Melancholy' in *Nicholas Breton: Melancholike Humours* (Scholartis Press, 1929) and Theodore Spencer, 'The Elizabethan Malcontent' in James G. McManaway, Giles E. Dawson and Edwin E. Willoughby, eds, *Joseph Quincy Adams: Memorial Studies* (Folger Shakespeare Library, 1948) as well as works cited above by Lyons and Babb.
[16] Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady*, p.74.
[17] Lyons, *Voices of Melancholy*, pp.23–24.
[18] Madeleine Doran, *Endeavors of Art: A Study of Form in Elizabethan Drama* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1954) p.229.

political dissident, a bitter misanthropist, or a cynic, as well as one with a specific grievance. Although it is possible to classify some dramatic characters as cynics or misanthropists because their function is largely limited to commentary – such as Thersites in *Troilus and Cressida* and Apemantus in *Timon of Athens*, both of whom are comparable to the professionally bitter fool – it is fruitless to try to differentiate these malcontented types too rigidly, as for example the stage Machiavel may be driven by plain ambition but may express himself with a misanthropic gift for satire, like Shakespeare's Richard III. 'Discontent' is an alternative term for clearly motivated melancholia; *Richard III* opens with a reference to 'the winter of [Yorkist] discontent' under Lancastrian rule. In *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *The Malcontent*, discontentedness is a near synonym for malcontentedness. Vindice's father died 'Of discontent, the nobleman's consumption'; the wronged Antonio is introduced in a stage direction as '*the discontented Lord Antonio*'; and Hippolito introduces Vindice as 'my discontented brother'.[19] Discontent can be performed, it seems, in easily recognizable ways, since Vindice slips into his role with aplomb, while in *The Malcontent*, Malevole asks 'Play I well the free-breathed discontent?' (I.iv.31).

Whatever the terminology favoured in individual plays, melancholia is associated with an intensity of feeling. The melancholic malcontent with a real or imagined grievance commonly nurses it with a passion that drives all his words and actions. He may share traits with any of the types mentioned above, but his most striking dramatic characteristics are his ability to propel the plot and his tendency to confide in the audience in order to communicate his motives and rationalize his plans. This powerful behaviour is predicated on possessing a certain level of knowledge and experience, and melancholia was indeed considered to be an affliction of the educated gentleman. Anyone from a lower social rank displaying analogous symptoms could be roundly mocked as an upstart, a fraud, or simply as a sufferer from foibles that deserved blunter labels. In John Lyly's *Midas* (c. 1589), Midas's barber Motto claims: 'I am as melancholy as a cat'. This is the response of Licio, himself a mere page: 'Melancholy? Marry gup, is melancholy a word for a barber's mouth? Thou shouldst say, heavy, dull, and doltish. Melancholy is the crest of courtiers' arms, and now

[19] *The Revenger's Tragedy* I.i.127, I.iv.1, IV.ii.35; all quotations from MacDonald P. Jackson, ed., *The Revenger's Tragedy* in Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino, eds, *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works* (Clarendon Press, 2007).

every base companion, being in his mubble-fubbles, says he is melancholy'.[20] Social affectation of this type is a staple of Jonson's humours comedies, as discussed in Part 4; Jonson emphasized the moral rather than psychological implications of humours theory, clearly differentiating the envious type of malcontent such as Macilente from the moral stance of a figure such as that character's 'creator', Asper.

This association between 'genuine' melancholic humours and the possession of a certain social standing was not only a rich source for comedy, as discussed in Chapter 7, but served to complicate the ways audiences might respond to characters of a more ambiguous status. Melancholia could be irrational or trivial when viewed in a certain light, or rational and of profound consequence in another. Many dramatic malcontent figures are of just this uncertain status; before the play opens, they have been dispossessed of the standing that is rightfully theirs (like Hamlet or Malevole) or deprived of expected opportunities for advancement (Vindice or Bosola). They are therefore in an ambiguous social position, widening the possible frames of interpretation for their melancholia, and it is precisely the vital question of their social status that motivates their dramatic action.

James R. Keller writes that, when differentiating malcontents from mere melancholics, 'The malcontent can be most easily recognized through his unwillingness to adjust to his social class'.[21] But what is striking about malcontents such as those named above is that the audience is highly likely to sympathize with this 'unwillingness'– even if it is ultimately taken to extremes – since any accommodation would involve submitting to a wrongful evaluation of the protagonist's abilities and social or intellectual status. This motivated lack of 'adjustment' to the social order creates an outsider status that confers a certain compensatory freedom, especially freedom of speech. Malevole is, according to the duke who nominally rules over him, Pietro, 'as free as air; he blows over every man' (I.iii.2). The relative liberty he enjoys, along with his powerful determination to use it, makes such a malcontent potentially dangerous from the outset.

The popular correlation between melancholia and a certain social or intellectual prestige points to the fact that it was also considered a male rather than female

[20] *Midas* V.ii.102–107; quotation from Anne Begor Lancashire, ed., *Gallathea and Midas by John Lyly* (Edward Arnold, 1970).
[21] James R. Keller, *Princes, Soldiers and Rogues: The Politic Malcontent of Renaissance Drama* (Peter Lang, 1993) p.5.

attribute. Indeed, misogyny is often an important component in malcontent railings against the world, with the alleged vices of women always a popular theme. But paradoxically, the experience of melancholy was often said to be feminizing, because it signalled that reason had been overcome by the passions, and the soul was overwhelmed by the fluid physiological processes associated with the humours; reason and the soul were considered masculine principles, while the passions and the troublingly fluid body were feminine. The volatile moods of the melancholic were associated with the alleged changeability and unreliability of women, while the prominence of romantic love as a cause of melancholy also supported the idea of feminization, since a man suffering from this type of melancholy was in danger of surrendering his masculine power and agency to a woman. Burton wrote that 'Love Melancholy' is 'full of fear, anxiety, doubt, care, peevishness, suspicion, it turns a man into a woman'.[22] Mark Breitenberg, in his study of *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England*, explores the emasculating effects attributed to melancholia of all types, and its problematic relationship to masculine ideals. He also points out the similarities between Burton's remarks about women and his descriptions of melancholic men: 'Indeed, any one of Burton's misogynistic descriptions of woman could be applied to the melancholic'.[23] The difference between the two for Burton, however, is that the experience of male melancholics is worthy of minute study, and it is viewed in the context of inherent masculine dignity and worth.

Women's experiences and temperaments were rarely included in the categories of melancholia. Martin Middeke and Christina Wald, in their Introduction to *The Literature of Melancholia*, note that 'melancholia has usually been understood as an inherently masculine phenomenon – as far as it was connoted positively'.[24] Women are usually depicted as grieving or in a depressed state rather than melancholic; as Juliana Schiesari puts it, 'the less glorious double of melancholy, mourning, is a traditional women's ritual', and it is accorded scant significance in a patriarchal

[22] Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Henry Cripps, 1651), 3.2, 'Symptoms or signs of Love Melancholy', p.510.
[23] Mark Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England* (Cambridge University Press, 1996) p.54.
[24] Martin Middeke and Christina Wald, eds, *The Literature of Melancholia: Early Modern to Postmodern* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) p.10.

culture.[25] In George Chapman's *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois*, the Countess of Cambrai literally weeps herself blind, in a mistaken cause and to little effect. Grieving women are associated with silence or with madness, rather than meaningful speech. When Ophelia briefly mourns the Hamlet she knew, she declares herself 'of ladies most deject and wretched', and cries 'O woe is me' (III.i.154, 159), but after the killing of her father her grief is expressed in madness. *The Duchess of Malfi* offers an interesting case study in feminine melancholy, as the Duchess is one of several characters described as melancholic in the play (others will be discussed below). The Duchess's melancholia is associated with negative behaviour – Ferdinand remarks that 'Her melancholy seems to be fortified / With a strange disdain' and he offers her a perverse 'cure' for it[26] – and with the type of mourning that Schiesari describes as 'a traditional women's ritual'. When the Duchess asks Cariola to 'Discourse to me some dismal tragedy', the waiting-woman demurs: 'O, 'twill increase your melancholy'. The Duchess's reply seems to disclaim the dignity of melancholy, replacing it with the experience of grief: 'Thou art deceived; / To hear of greater grief would lessen mine' (IV.ii.8–10). The Duchess suffers as a wife and mother separated from her family rather than as a political prisoner dispossessed of her duchy and denied the power to rule. She is the victim of usurpers, but in early modern drama women did not maintain the role of malcontent because they could not sustain a position of political, intellectual or physical resistance to authority; the Duchess does not become a melancholic malcontent. Although shortly before submitting to her execution she can assert 'I am Duchess of Malfi still', at the point of death she speaks of her children and her religion, contrasting 'heaven's gates' with 'princes' palaces' (IV.ii.134, 224–225). Women's primary relationship is not their relation to power; their primary voice is to be heard in the role of daughter, sister, wife or mother.

Schiesari writes of the 'possible systematic exclusion of women from the canon of melancholia'.[27] The codification of that canon, as we have seen, created a context in which the characteristics imputed to melancholia began with gender, social class and modes of self-presentation, included psychological and physical traits, and led to assumptions about the melancholic's likely language and behaviour. Dramatic

[25] Juliana Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholia: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Symbolics of Loss in Renaissance Literature* (Cornell University Press, 1992) p.xi.
[26] *The Duchess of Malfi* IV.i.11–12, IV.ii.43; all quotations from René Weis, ed., *John Webster: The Duchess of Malfi and Other Plays* (Oxford University Press, 2009).
[27] Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholia*, p.4.

characters such as Vindice and Malevole instrumentalize the melancholia that begins as a response to ill-fortune and dispossession in order to create a useful disguise; other characters can be relied upon to stereotype them as malcontents who will speak and act in certain ways. Lussurioso's assumptions about Vindice in his second disguise arise from Hippolito's description of him as 'a man / In whom much melancholy dwells' (IV.i.55–56). This second persona – the melancholy brother of Hippolito – is almost indistinguishable from Vindice's 'real' identity; only his knowledge and intentions are disguised, while his ruthlessness is exaggerated for theatrical effect. As remarked above, it is obvious to Vindice how to present himself in this melancholic role and how to use it to further his plot. In the first disguise, Lussurioso had characterized him as a 'Fine villain!' (I.iii.56). In melancholic mode, Vindice appears to Lussurioso to be more malleable in villainy: 'for discontent and want / Is the best clay to mould a villain of' and 'He being of black condition, suitable / To want and ill content, hope of preferment / Will grind him to an edge' (IV.i.48–49, 70–72). However, it is clear to the audience that Vindice is now leading in sophisticated villainy, rather than being led. Lussurioso diagnoses in him a 'parlous melancholy' and quickly comes to admire its acuity: 'I think I shall affect his melancholy' (IV.ii.105, 116). He is also convinced that the melancholic will easily be driven to revenge: to be true to his nature, Lussurioso says, Vindice should 'be valiant / And kill thine enemies' (174–175). The significance of the connections between melancholy and revenge will be discussed later in this chapter.

Melancholy and malcontents in literature

The stage malcontent's origins have been traced to the 1580s, a time characterized by historians as one of increasing disaffection among the younger generation of gentry and aristocracy. W. David Kay writes: 'In the Essex conspiracy of 1601 such disaffection had turned into outright rebellion, but it had been given literary recognition since the late 1580s by allusions to malcontents in Elizabethan fiction and prose satire'.[28] Detailing the economic and social dislocations of the 1590s, John Guy points to the importance of drama as a means of relatively free expression of

[28] W. David Kay, ed., *John Marston: The Malcontent*, p.xx.

discontent: 'The least inhibited medium of late-Elizabethan political commentary was the theatre'.[29]

The earliest citation in the Oxford English Dictionary for the noun 'malcontent' in English is dated 1575, but interestingly the 1587 citation from a passage in *Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* reveals that the word 'mal-contents' has replaced 'rebels', used in the 1577 edition. This provides evidence not only that the term had become more current since the previous decade, but also that its meaning encompassed a development from the more straightforwardly pejorative term 'rebel' (as Bridget Gellert Lyons notes).[30] Lucia Nigri traces the occurrence of the word 'malcontent' in the drama of the period, noting that 'its use goes into decline at the end of the century, just before the character-type to which modern criticism most commonly applies the term achieves its most powerful embodiment'.[31] Nigri points out that Shakespeare uses the word 'malcontent' in his early works of the 1590s, but never in tragedy. However, we should note that 'melancholy' and its cognates retain their currency in the era's drama.

Lyons' *Voices of Melancholy* offers a convincing account of the 'conditions from which the literary "malcontent" type arose', with the Elizabethan stage offering representations of the 'contemplativeness of the melancholy temperament' and also 'the disaffected or discontented people who made their presence felt in London towards the end of the sixteenth century'.[32] In Lyons' work and elsewhere, critical attention has been paid to Jaques in *As You Like It* as a melancholy character who is possibly a prototype stage malcontent; his status as a comic malcontent will be discussed in Part 4.

James R. Keller discusses the reasons for the rise in popularity of the malcontent figure. 'At a time of great social change and subsequent suffering, the malcontent offered a paradigm of the courageous, if unethical individual who meets the vicissitudes of inexorable fate with daring and resourcefulness. Or perhaps his appeal lay in his words, rather than his actions; thus, he served as vicarious mouthpiece for

[29] John Guy, 'Introduction, The 1590s: The second reign of Elizabeth I?' in John Guy, ed., *The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade* (Cambridge University Press, 1995) p.16.
[30] Lyons, *Voices of Melancholy*, p.18.
[31] Lucia Nigri, 'The Origin of "Malcontent" ', *Notes and Queries* Vol. 59 No.1, March 2012, 37–40, p.39.
[32] Lyons, *Voices of Melancholy*, p.17.

the troubled masses who could not voice their individual complaints.'[33] Whether or not the early modern audience regarded the stage malcontent as a 'vicarious mouthpiece' in this political sense, it is argued in this study that playwrights do indeed emphasize the 'daring and resourcefulness' of the malcontent and aim to induce audience engagement with him as a character with a distinctive voice.

Critics have also traced the origin of the literary malcontent to prose and verse satires. Lyons points out that in the 1590s, 'The division of malcontents into recognizable types became a feature of some satires'. Satire could be found in the juxtaposition between the persuasiveness of these witty accounts of stereotypes and 'the malcontent's claims to individuality and profundity'.[34] The targets of Marston's verse satires are often cited as forerunners for dramatic malcontents, with Marston himself labelled melancholy or a malcontent. Babb writes that 'Marston is apparently a malcontent. There could be no better illustration of the malcontent's bitter and strident invective than his *Satires* and his *The Scourge of Villainy*'.[35] Babb also points to Marston's invocation of a personified Melancholy, as 'Thou nursing Mother of faire wisedoms lore', in the *proemium* to the first book of the latter work.[36] Marston's positivity here about the insights associated with melancholia, along with his assertion that a sombre demeanour is appropriate to the task of exposing human venality, recalls the Aristotelian model of melancholy rather than Galenic theories about unbalanced humours. A sufferer from the latter could be accused of building his critique of society upon shaky foundations. As melancholia could be regarded as promoting either intellectual discernment or pathological self-absorption, the malcontent could act as either the agent or the object of an author's satire, and often both.

The melancholic was intrinsically theatrical, fluctuating between modes of behaviour that were easily recognizable as types, and tending to express himself with dramatic over-emphasis. This connection with role-playing, to be discussed below, is explicit in one contemporary account that compares melancholics with drunkards, dominated by

[33] Keller, *Princes, Soldiers and Rogues*, p.31.
[34] Lyons, *Voices of Melancholy*, pp.22–23.
[35] Lawrence Babb, 'Melancholy and the Elizabethan Man of Letters', *Huntington Library Quarterly* Vol. 4 No. 3, April 1941, 247–261, p.259.
[36] John Marston, *The Scourge of Villainy* Book I line 9; quotation from Arnold Davenport, ed., *The Poems of John Marston* (Liverpool University Press, 1961).

their ‘affections and phansies’ and ‘gesturing as though they were Stage Players’.[37] When the Bishops’ Ban of 1599 targeted satirical writings (although it seems to have been poorly enforced), drama was not only safer than print but offered a congenial medium for satire. An outlet was still sought because, as Andrew Gurr points out, satire retained its marketability ‘In a city lacking newspapers and dependent on gossip amongst the crowds for their news’.[38] In the same year as the ban, the melancholy Jaques took to the stage in *As You Like It* as both agent and object of satire, a comic figure in contrast to the satirists, plotters, and tool villains who were later to characterize tragedy in the playhouses.

Jaques perhaps occupies a mid-point in a development from the melancholic malcontent recognized in the 1580s (a tragic protagonist such as *The Spanish Tragedy*’s Hieronimo) to the sophisticated, metadramatic malcontents of the first decade of the seventeenth century. As discussed in the previous chapter, the latter become more theatrically self-aware and self-consciously manipulative. A malcontent such as Vindice or Hamlet claims the authority – because of superior intellect or moral sensitivity – to judge others; but since his melancholia causes him to be temperamentally unbalanced and his position is socially precarious, he can be pitied, and is perhaps not held fully responsible for his behaviour. Webster tests this question of the melancholic malcontent’s responsibility for his own actions to the limit in Bosola and Flamineo, as discussed below.

Dramatic melancholy

At the beginning of *The Merchant of Venice*, the remarks of the eponymous merchant Antonio link the experience of melancholia to role-playing in terms that recall Jaques’s most famous speech: ‘I hold the world but as the world, Gratiano, / A stage, where every man must play a part, / And mine a sad one’ (I.i.77–79). The association between role-playing and melancholia enriched the dramatic vocabulary for the depiction of melancholy onstage, taking it beyond the conventions of costume and body language described above. Physical signs of melancholy included a pale complexion (Hamlet’s ‘pale cast of thought’, III.i.84), whereas the anger of the revenger makes for a red colouring, explained in humours theory as the result of

[37] Levinus Lemnius, *The Touchstone of Complexions*, translated by Thomas Newton (Thomas Marsh, 1576) sig. 149v.
[38] Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage 1574–1642* Fourth Edition (Cambridge University Press, 2009) p.33.

blood being drawn away from or to the face. Involuntary bodily symptoms revealing the effects of passions were frequently indicated onstage by verbal descriptions, as in Corin's 'pageant' offering to display 'the pale complexion of true love / And the red glow of scorn and proud disdain' in *As You Like It*.[39] This onstage narration supplements the actors' work in communicating the passions. While drawing attention to their physical presence and to any discrepancies between actor and role, these moments foreground the power of poetic drama to conjure emotions that have an effect on the physical world. The processes to which the humours and the passions subject bodies are in themselves a narrative, and theatre worked with the well-established frameworks of melancholia to create new kinds of dramatic characters to extend these narratives. As Lyons writes, 'The contemplativeness of the melancholy temperament received formal expression in the solitary meditations of the stage melancholic; delusions and madness in a particular kind of visionary speech; calculation and shrewdness in the machinations of the villainous plotter; discontent in the justified or unjustified alienation of the satirist or revenger'.[40]

The responses of other characters to these types of melancholic malcontent are revealing. Those in power, such as Duke Pietro in *The Malcontent*, can frame the relationship in a way that demonstrates their own superior authority and sagacity; Pietro claims that he tolerates Malevole's 'dogged sullenness' because 'he gives good intelligence to my spirit, makes me understand those weaknesses which others' flattery palliates' (I.ii.9, 26–28). Jealous fellow courtiers such as Bilioso often stress the disreputable nature of the melancholic's behaviour and social standing (he calls Malevole an 'improvident rascal', I.iii.37, among many other insults). And the readily corruptible, such as Mendoza in this play and Lussurioso in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, are swiftly suborned. The dramatic significance of such responses lies in the way they not only delineate individual characters but expose the degree of cohesion, or lack thereof, in the society depicted. Questions are raised, such as: Can this melancholia be acknowledged and its concerns assimilated, or is it disruptive? Within the world of the play, does it seem aberrant, or comprehensible? Answers to such questions go some way towards defining the differences between the comic malcontent, whose doubts and ruminations add texture within an essentially cohesive framework, and the tragic

[39] *As You Like It* III.iv.48–50; quotation from Juliet Dusinberre, ed., *As You Like It*, Arden edition (Bloomsbury, 2006).
[40] Lyons, *Voices of Melancholy*, p.17.

malcontent with his exploitation of divisions and his desire for the type of redress that endangers the existing order.

Caustic condemnation of corrupt rulers and degenerate systems is expected from the melancholic malcontent as a sign of honesty and forthrightness, and his criticisms are often corroborated by other characters in a more subtle way. By the time of Cyril Tourneur's *The Atheist's Tragedy* (1611) and Chapman's *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois* (1613), villains who hope to be taken for principled plain-speakers simulate such critiques.[41] Despite this reputation for candour, however, a concealed movement towards revenge is also consistent with melancholia. Melancholic humours were naturally cold and dry, befitting the sad and satiric commentator, but could produce vengefulness when they were combined with the passion of rage. The 'melancholy adust' or burnt melancholy described by Thomas Elyot in *The Castel of Helth* (1541), as well as in Bright's *Treatise*, was a type of melancholia that had become hot as a result of being burned by choleric humours.[42] Therefore 'Melancholy adust explains the aftereffects of spent rage'.[43] This smouldering sense of past injustices is a significant trait in potential revengers, as will be discussed in Part 3.

The responses of onstage and offstage audiences to these diverse manifestations of melancholia are frequently complicated by the use of disguise, which often becomes a basic plot point, especially in the case of a disguised ruler (such as Malevole) or disguised revenger (Vindice). As a more subtle form of disguise, melancholic plotters often use common assumptions about melancholia as a means of convincing others they are harmless. In *The Duchess of Malfi*, Ferdinand tells his spy Bosola to 'Keep your old garb of melancholy; 'twill express / You envy those that stand above your reach, / Yet strive not to come near 'em' (I.i.269–271). Tactics such as this were associated in the popular imagination with Machiavellian intrigue, in line with contemporary interpretations of Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince*. Machiavelli's

[41] See D'Amville (to Charlemont) in the first scene of *The Atheist's Tragedy*; and Baligny, at the opening of *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*: 'having sworn my service in the search / Of all such malcontents and their designs, / By seeming one affected with their faction / And discontented humours 'gainst the state' (I.i.123–126); quotation from Katharine Eisaman Maus, ed., *Four Revenge Tragedies* (Oxford University Press, 2008).
[42] David Houston Wood, *Time, Narrative, and Emotion in Early Modern England* (Routledge, 2016) p.4.
[43] Gail Kern Paster, 'Melancholy Cats, Lugged Bears and Cosmology' in Paster, Katherine Rowe and Mary Floyd-Wilson, eds, *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004) p.118.

ideas were represented in the English theatre by the cynical and ruthless pursuit of political power or personal ambition, featuring murder and mayhem within an Italianate setting. Yet the metadramatic nature of this stage Machiavellianism tends to mitigate any threat it carries, guaranteeing that its stratagems will ultimately fail, since such scheming by its nature should be kept secret and its power should be hoarded, rather than shared by a soliloquizing plotter across a playhouse. By confiding in the audience, asserting the necessity of his actions and condemning the conditions that have forced him into dangerous plots, the malcontent (as is argued in Part 1 of this study) places spectators in the role of overseeing deity and implicitly or explicitly anticipates his own judgement and downfall. The inevitability of such a reckoning serves to highlight the malcontent's isolation and melancholic fate, despite his bravado.

The obligation to adopt a disguise or a pose such as Machiavellianism, for Bosola as for other malcontents harbouring a social grievance, is therefore a cause as well as a symptom of melancholia; it demonstrates the limitations and indignities to which they are subjected. Webster, for example, emphasizes in both Flamineo and Bosola an awareness of the demeaning and self-defeating nature of their role-playing. At the end of one scene in which Flamineo has displayed his talent for manipulating others through verbal trickery, he turns to the audience to justify this behaviour: 'It may appear to some ridiculous / Thus to talk knave and madman […] But this allows my varying of shapes'.[44] Flamineo and Lodovico briefly conspire together to adopt all the external signs of melancholia that suit their outcast situations, appealing to the 'god of melancholy' for inspiration (III.iii.61). Their dejection and desperation are real, yet the act of manifesting their plight in a conventionalized form brings them relief: it provides a space in which they can assert their agency and resourcefulness, and establish a distance between degrading experiences and their 'real' autonomous selves. Nevertheless, the grievances nursed by such characters lead only to cycles of retribution, and their exclusion from power leaves them exposed to the fate of mere tool villains; these topics are discussed in Part 3.

The melancholic pose is evidently an overfamiliar one by the time of *The Duchess of Malfi*, yet all the main characters of this play are associated with melancholy (rather

[44] *The White Devil* IV.ii.236–239; all quotations from René Weis, ed., *John Webster: The Duchess of Malfi and Other Plays*.

than a specified discontent), and this becomes an important motif. References to the Duchess's melancholia have been noted above. The Cardinal, according to Antonio, is 'a melancholy churchman' (I.i.150) harbouring thwarted ambitions to become Pope. Antonio also says that his own exile from Malfi has rendered him 'melancholy' (I.i.387). The Doctor diagnoses Ferdinand as suffering from an overflow of 'melancholy humour' (V.ii.9), and even Julia's perilous situation is likened to a 'melancholy perch' (II.iv.28). But only in Bosola is melancholia developed as a psychologically motivating force as well as serving to position the character for plot purposes. At the beginning of the play he is introduced to the audience in terms recalling the tropes of the malcontent, as he complains of receiving ill rewards for dangerous service. Antonio, acting as commentator here, describes Bosola as 'very valiant' but regrets the fact that he is 'thus neglected', since his 'foul melancholy / Will poison all his goodness'. It is well known, Antonio goes on, that 'want of action / Breeds all black malcontents' (I.i.70–76). The analyses offered by the play's characters (especially Antonio) of each other's states of mind thus provide circumstantial motivations – and potential cures – for each case of melancholia. The Cardinal advises Bosola to 'Throw to the devil' his 'melancholy' because there are 'honours in store' for him if he will agree to act in a devilish manner (V.ii.300–304). Melancholia also feeds on itself; Bosola blames it for his impression that the Duchess is haunting him (V.ii.342). Nevertheless, the contradictory notion that melancholia may be motivated by events while also constituting a false or unnatural imposition upon human nature is always in evidence. To Ferdinand, Bosola's melancholia is a useful disguise, as noted above, until after the Duchess's murder when he curses Bosola for being 'a good actor […] playing a villain's part' (IV.ii.281–282). Antonio judges Bosola's melancholic demeanour to be a pose, and one that is redundant and unwise: 'you continue this out-of-fashion melancholy. Leave it, leave it' (II.i.81–82). Antonio can evidently see through the signs of melancholia and frustrated ambition to something more promising in Bosola's nature. This judgement is consistent with Bosola's assessment of himself. At the end of the play he laments all that he has done in the guise of a scheming malcontent, once more using metadramatic terms to point to the discrepancy between roles and the self by claiming that he was forced to become 'an actor' of such parts 'Much 'gainst mine own good nature', and that he killed Antonio in 'Such a mistake as I have often seen / In a play' (V.v.84–85, 94–95).

The play also identifies Bosola as a scholar, though little evidence of this is seen in productions today. As Babb points out, this characterization is 'for no obvious dramatic reason', but in the early modern period, 'So strong is the association between melancholy and learning that not only do the scholars of the drama tend to be melancholy but melancholy persons tend to be scholarly'.[45] The audience is told that Bosola has been 'a fantastical scholar' in Padua (III.iii.41), and Antonio finds him in 'contemplation […] studying to become a great wise fellow' (II.i.72–73). It is in this fastidious, rather cerebral way, therefore, that Bosola is understood to be the 'court-gall', although he is clearly tainted by the malcontent's envy: he is one whose 'railing' is 'not for simple love of piety; / Indeed he rails at those things which he wants' (I.i.23–25).

Melancholic satirists such as Bosola seek to differentiate themselves from those engaged in the pursuit of personal ambition. In an almost parodic homage to the malcontents who have trod the stage before him, Bosola demands of audience members that they 'Observe my meditation now' before launching into a blank-verse discourse on the 'deformity' of humankind (II.i.40–56). Melancholy, he points out, gives him leave to speak bluntly, 'to be honest in any phrase' (83). But Bosola is unusual among malcontents in that later in the play he expresses remorse for his actions well before he senses the approach of death. It is the absence of his anticipated rewards that causes him to return to the disillusioned state in which he began, suggesting that his motivations were indeed purely material; moreover, as indicated above he has a particular tendency to disown his actions when they are committed in disguise (a topic to be discussed in Chapter 6). However, through the remarkable technique of depicting its central revenge murder in the fourth act – perhaps a function of the fact that its victim is female – the play has created space in which the malcontent can reflect upon his roles and deeds. Bosola's remorse, although rendered more complex by the sense that his disguise as a faithful servant of the Duchess comes close to vindication by the end of the play, is that of the classic tool villain with little of a personal nature at stake in the schemes of others. In this he is unlike a revenger such as Vindice, who assumes the role of tool villain in order to pursue the complicated revenge that he desires passionately for himself. The murder of the Duke

[45] Babb, 'Melancholy and the Elizabethan Man of Letters', p.257.

in Act III cannot slake Vindice's thirst for further vengeance, upon the whole 'nest of dukes' (V.iii.125).

The discussion above has shown that the conventions of melancholia, often complex and incongruous, provide a unifying principle for dramatic characters who may exhibit a range of contradictory facets. They may be educated and socially presentable, yet impecunious and in a position of servitude; they can be full of insight, yet temperamentally unstable; may appear to be suffering from wretched circumstances, yet also from a physiological condition; may be self-absorbed, yet intellectually curious and able to intuit the motives of others. The stage malcontent, heir to this tradition of complexity, will evoke varied audience responses: spectators may regard him as by turns a dullard, an intellectual, a revolutionary, or a social poseur; he may appear as a character to be trusted, or to be feared, to be identified with, or to be reviled. These contradictions map onto the dynamic nature of the melancholic's relation to his passions and his capacity for action, and make for fertile ground on which skilful playwrights can cultivate the impression that a character possesses a multi-faceted personality. Bosola is one melancholic character in whom complexity is suggested, but a decade earlier the consummate dramatization of the melancholic tropes that had entered the popular imagination was doubtless achieved in *Hamlet*.

Hamlet and melancholia

As Lyons writes, Hamlet plays 'a variety of melancholy roles: disillusioned scholar, satirist and misogynist, ambitious political malcontent, melancholy lover, madman. Each is […] particularly directed at the character who is most receptive to it, and each is exaggerated and rendered theatrical to the point where it cannot be said to "denote" him truly'. Lyons describes the way Hamlet enacts these roles with the aid of 'costumes and props' such as the disordered clothing described by Ophelia in II.i.75–78, where he is depicted as a classic love-melancholic.[46] Also, Hamlet uses clichéd terms to play upon Rosencrantz's assumption that his melancholy is caused by thwarted ambition: 'Sir, I lack advancement' (III.ii.331).

Hamlet's performance as the melancholic scholar is much more developed than the scant references to Bosola's scholarliness mentioned above. When he enters reading a

[46] Lyons, *Voices of Melancholy*, pp.80–81.

book, Gertrude points out how 'sadly the poor wretch comes reading', and Hamlet maintains this role by making sardonic remarks about the absence of censorship for its writer, the 'satirical rogue' whose proposition, 'though I most powerfully and potently believe, yet I hold it not honesty to have it thus set down'. Yet Polonius interprets all Hamlet's responses here as the symptoms of love melancholy: 'Still harping on my daughter. […] 'A is far gone' (II.ii.165–199). The obtuse Polonius is the play's anti-intellectual, against whom the melancholy wit of Hamlet can score only too easily. According to Bright's *Treatise*, the fact that wit is characteristic of the melancholic is explained by physiology: 'Sometime it falleth out, that melancholie men are found verie wittie, and quickly discerne: […] because the humour of melancholie with some heate is so made subtile, that as from the driest woode riseth the clearest flame, […] in like sort their spirits, […] receaving a purenesse, are instrumentes of such sharpnesse'.[47] The passions and delusions associated with melancholy were likely to find expression in poetic language and imagery, as Hamlet's soliloquies demonstrate. Skilful use of language and a scholarly disposition were valued; Douglas Trevor writes that Hamlet's 'behavior would have been understood – we might even say excused – by early modern playgoers in light of his intellectualism'. Trevor relies on Hamlet's bookish metaphor about his 'inky cloak' and his 'customary suits of solemn black' (I.ii.77, 78) to argue that the opening to the play 'wastes little time in positing two alternative poles responsible for Hamlet's mood, the one rooted in learning, the other in mourning'.[48]

The absorbing issues for the audience of *Hamlet* are how far each of the melancholy roles he adopts is expressive of the prince's 'natural' persona, and how they relate to the situation in Elsinore. Because of the extraordinary intimacy created by the title character's soliloquizing, *Hamlet* offers perhaps the clearest exposition of the interconnection between the private and public aspects of melancholia, and this is where it locates its deepest dilemmas. Hamlet is explicit in naming and laying claim to his condition; in soliloquy he terms it 'my weakness and my melancholy' (II.ii.536), and he describes his experience of it in selective detail to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (beginning 'I have of late, but wherefore I know not, lost all my mirth', II.ii.261–275).

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[47] Timothie Bright, *A Treatise of Melancholie* (Thomas Vautrollier, 1586) p.130.
[48] Douglas Trevor, *The Poetics of Melancholy in Early Modern England* (Cambridge University Press, 2004) p.64.

One of Hamlet's first speeches expresses his awareness of the unreliability of outward intimations of grief or melancholia, 'the trappings and the suits of woe'. Dependence on such easily fabricated signs disgusts him, yet he feels a powerful longing for his grief and bitterness to be manifested in the world, and acknowledged by it. Acutely aware of the role-playing of others, he finds it impossible to believe that anyone other than Horatio will respond honestly and appropriately to him, and complains of being 'played upon' like a pipe when urged to reveal the 'cause' of his 'distemper' to others (III.ii.328–329, 363). Those who have questionable motives attempt to ascribe his melancholic behaviour to causes that are pertinent to their own aims – including the love melancholy diagnosed by Polonius, and the thwarted political ambition suspected by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Their painful attempts to practise traditional 'cures' – to 'loose' Ophelia upon him, and especially to reason away, or distract him from, his grief at his father's death – are instructive to an audience pondering Hamlet's varying manifestations of melancholia. It is significant that the only 'cure' to which he responds favourably is that offered by the travelling players. Their frank and creative role-playing provides welcome relief from the dishonest ambience that oppresses him, and the uncongenial roles that have been thrust upon him. Furthermore, writing 'a speech of some dozen lines, or sixteen lines' for their play offers him an appealingly literary stratagem for moving forward in his pursuit of certainty about Claudius's guilt (II.ii.477).

Hamlet's frank embrace of the players, like his openness with Horatio, contrasts with the unattractive aspects of his melancholic demeanour. This helps to establish that his bitter discontent, while it may hurt those who are tangential to its aim – such as Ophelia – is directed at specific targets; it does not consume Hamlet's whole nature. Claudius, who of all characters is motivated to observe him closely, conceives of Hamlet's melancholy as a separate entity from any grievance the prince may have, and moreover a powerful and fertile one: 'There's something in his soul / O'er which his melancholy sits on brood / And I do doubt the hatch and the disclose / Will be some danger' (III.i.163–166).[49] Hamlet is clearly in need of protection against those who would probe at the causes, and attempt to control the effects, of his melancholia.

[49] In the First Quarto, the King's first address to Hamlet characterizes him as melancholy: 'And now, princely son Hamlet, / What means these sad and melancholy moods?' (2.26–27): quotation from Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, eds, *Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623*, Arden edition (Thomson Learning, 2006).

He is unable to conceal his identity and his sense of dispossession, but assumes the 'antic disposition' as a cover for the biting satire with which he responds to the situation in Elsinore, just as Altofronto assumes the role of the malcontented Malevole in order to speak frankly of his disillusionment in Pietro's dukedom. Both characters use satire as a channel for grievances that would otherwise be unexpressed, as well as to disguise their intentions while they search for opportunities to right egregious wrongs.

Hamlet assumes the persona of mentally disturbed satirist while he comes to terms with the more fateful role of the melancholic revenger compelled to act from of a sense of duty. 'The time is out of joint; O cursed spite / That ever I was born to set it right!' (I.v.186–187). The two roles of satirist and revenger represent two separate tasks: the satirist can attempt to counter wrongdoing by administering a corrective consisting of powerful words, as he does to Gertrude; he will 'speak daggers to her but use none' (III.ii.386) and 'be cruel only to be kind' (III.iv.176). Satire can also be used against Ophelia in order to negate her influence, and perhaps in an attempt to push her out of the way of danger. This is another step towards leaving behind those aspects of himself that are obstacles to adopting the revenger role; to avenge the wrong done by Claudius requires not words but violent action. But after the shipboard adventure in which he consigns Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to certain death, Hamlet returns to Denmark having seemingly renounced both satire and the violent pursuit of vengeance. It appears that both have failed him as a means to express himself, or have proved impossible to sustain, or both. There can be no more springing of traps, but merely a resolve to respond adequately to events as they occur. Since 'no man of aught he leaves knows', he comments, 'Let be' (V.ii.200–202). The reconciliations achieved in *The Malcontent*'s Genoa are clearly impossible in Elsinore, but the fatalistic melancholy adopted by the returning Hamlet constitutes a development on the despair and self-reproach with which he begins the play. It transpires that his relative passivity is now inconsequential, since his former demeanour and the acts he has already performed – above all the accidental killing of Polonius – prove sufficient to prompt actions and reactions (by others and on his own part) that will drive events to a conclusion.

Earlier, Hamlet disparaged himself for his inaction: he calls himself 'dull and muddy-mettled' (II.ii.502), and imagines his father labelling him 'tardy' (III.iv.103). Failing

to act makes him less than a man, an 'ass' (II.ii.517) and as irresponsible as a 'beast' (IV.iv.34). Comment and criticism since the eighteenth century attest to the fact that Hamlet's procrastination has long been considered one of the most striking features of the play,[50] and that for all his self-accusations of cowardice, it does not seem to be motivated by fearfulness. But there is no evidence that in the seventeenth century his delay was considered to be of great significance, and to audiences in the Globe his melancholy humour may have offered a sufficient explanation (should one have been necessary) for Hamlet's procrastination. Thomas Overbury writes that the melancholy man 'thinkes busines, but neuer does any: he is all contemplation, no action'.[51] Bright's *Treatise*, too, repeatedly characterizes melancholics as slow to act. They are 'long in deliberation: suspicious, painefull in studie, and circumspect', and 'contemplations are more familiar with melancholicke persons then with other, by reason they be not so apt for action'.[52]

Bright's narrative descriptions of the progress of melancholia link this tendency for procrastination with a movement towards revenge, because the melancholic, 'being once throughly heat with a contrarie passion, retaineth the feruency thereof farre longer time then anie other complexion: and more feruently boyleth therewith, by reason his heart and spirite hath more solliditie of substance to entertayne deepely the passion'. Moreover, he is 'hardly moued to anger, but keeping it long, and not easie to be reconciled'.[53] The dramatic revenge protagonist enacts Bright's narrative in the theatre. The melancholic humour guarantees the 'feruency' of the passions aroused, and predisposes the sufferer, who is 'all contemplation', to communicate those contemplations in soliloquy. Melancholia then blends with simmering resentment, growing to anger and becoming a physiological driver of the impulse towards revenge. To the Globe audience, Hamlet's fatalism towards the play's end could indicate that his melancholia is yet to be displaced by the urge to revenge, but when his anger is aroused by Claudius's fencing-match conspiracy, contemplation and the laying of plots give way to action and reaction, to climactic effect.

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[50] Thompson and Taylor comment that given the existence of strikingly different texts, 'procrastination and delay may be part of the literary *Hamlet*, but not necessarily part of the theatrical *Hamlet*' (*Hamlet* Second Quarto, p.88n). The next chapter discusses differences between extant texts of *Hamlet*, and also the issue of delay.
[51] Sir Thomas Overbury, *New and Choise Characters, of seuerall Authors* (Laurence Lisle, 1615), 'A Melancholie Man', sig. D6r.
[52] Bright, *A Treatise of Melancholie*, pp.124, 200.
[53] Ibid pp.130–131, 124.

As this discussion has shown, theatricality is inherent in early modern concepts of melancholia – a state often associated with certain costumes, gestures, ways of speaking, the relationship between individual disposition and outside events, and the gap that separates contemplation from action. Hamlet's consciousness of all that is implied by his own melancholic state is manifested in dramatic self-awareness, one of the topics to be considered in the next chapter, which examines Hamlet as metadramatic malcontent.

Chapter 4 Hamlet as metadramatic malcontent

With his lament 'The time is out of joint', Hamlet succinctly summarizes the perspective of the dramatic malcontent.[1] The previous chapter concluded by discussing the ways in which Hamlet is characterized as a melancholic; this chapter examines the play as a *locus classicus* for development of the malcontent tradition, and focuses on the possible metadramatic effects created when *Hamlet* was first performed.

None of the three separate versions of *Hamlet* published in the early modern period (the origins of which are still subject to debate) nor modern conflated versions can inform us about the precise text used for performances in the Globe theatre at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Critical consensus is that the first quarto ('Q1', 1603) is highly 'actable' because it has brevity and pace, its soliloquies are briefer and arguably lend themselves to direct address to the audience, and its revenge plot appears more straightforward. As Zachary Lesser writes, 'A nod toward the "theatricality" of Q1 seems by now almost obligatory in editorial introductions and essays on Q1'.[2] The idea that these qualities connect Q1 definitively to a notional first acting version, and that it was possibly reconstructed from actors' memories, led Philip Edwards to write in the New Cambridge edition of the play that Q1 is 'The one link we have with *Hamlet* as acted at the Globe theatre'.[3] Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor show that some modern directors and actors who have worked with Q1 become convinced that it must be close to Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre practice.[4] However, there is little evidence that the brevity and simplicity of Q1 is calculated to please a Globe audience – whatever our ideas about their access to leisure time and their likely attention spans – or, for that matter, that it is a 'touring' version.

The title page of the second quarto ('Q2', 1604) carries the claim that this is 'the true and perfect Coppie', as opposed to Q1's 'As it hath beene diuerse times acted', but we are left to ponder the nature of the original of such a good 'Coppie'. As for the 1623

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[1] *Hamlet* I.v.186; all quotations unless otherwise noted from Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, eds, *Hamlet* Second Quarto, Arden edition (Bloomsbury, 2016).
[2] Zachary Lesser, *Hamlet After Q1: An Uncanny History of the Shakespearean Text* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015) p.216.
[3] Philip Edwards, ed., *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, New Cambridge edition (Cambridge University Press, 1985) p.24.
[4] Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, eds, *Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623*, Arden edition (Thomson Learning, 2006) pp.16–37.

Folio ('F'), some scholars place emphasis upon the involvement of King's Men actors in its publication, and therefore deduce a more sophisticated link to texts developed in performance than Q1's. Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen write that for several plays including *Hamlet*, 'the Quartos are probably closer to Shakespeare's original manuscript draft, but the Folio is undoubtedly closer to his playhouse'.[5] This assumption is perhaps supported by the conversation included in F, upon the arrival of the players, about the so-called 'war of the theatres', with its concession of defeat for 'Hercules and his load'.[6] The metaphor is a probable reference to the Globe itself, although the disputes over the children's companies were not topical by the time of F.

Harold Jenkins notes: 'I think one has to conclude that F, while manifestly having undergone some preparation for the stage, itself contains more than can be supposed to have been regularly played at the Globe'. He goes on to say that when discussing familiar forms of *Hamlet*, 'it is as well to recognize that the editorial tradition from Rowe on has always included things which, though indubitably of Shakespeare's composition, were probably never spoken on the stage'.[7] The following discussion acknowledges this necessary caution.

The version or versions of the play presented to the first audiences may now be irrecoverable in detail, but the political and social backdrop against which the drama was performed can to some extent be re-constructed. When *Hamlet* was first staged, it was clear that the reign of the ageing Queen Elizabeth was drawing to a close, amid uncertainty about her successor. Revenge tragedy traditionally had Hispanic and Italianate settings, and seemed to reflect the ethos of the Catholic enemies of the nation. But it is likely that the unsettling effects of the Essex conspiracy were creating an atmosphere in which the genre became associated with the intrigues and contending factions within the declining Elizabethan court itself. In depicting controversies over succession to the Danish crown and the legitimacy of its court, *Hamlet* was addressing issues that were close to home.

Despite such political resonances, one of the hallmarks of the play is the extent to which its eponymous hero's individual point of view dominates the audience's

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[5] Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen, eds, *William Shakespeare: Complete Works* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) p.56.
[6] First Folio (1623), Thompson and Taylor, eds, *Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623*, II.ii.336–360.
[7] Harold Jenkins, ed., *Hamlet*, Arden edition (Methuen, 1982) pp.56, 75.

experience. Another is its dramatic self-consciousness, with Hamlet reflecting on his position as both spectator and performer in Elsinore's drama, and above all pondering the role of revenger and the manner in which it has been imposed upon him. As this chapter will discuss, Hamlet's observations on the nature of dramatic performance and on the difficulties of purposeful action draw these themes together in a way that illuminates the relation between the malcontent's scripted words, his staged actions, and his audiences.

Point of view

The first speeches of the malcontent, where he confides his wrongs to the audience and establishes his point of view, are always defining moments. Spectators at a performance of *Hamlet* learn immediately that their relationship to the protagonist will be intimate but not straightforward, since Hamlet's first words are an aside that paradoxically appears both to confide in the audience and to signal that he shrinks from over-familiar contact. The uniqueness of his point of view is established by the punning observation about his relation to Claudius – 'A little more than kin, and less than kind' (I.ii.65) – which is, as remarked in Chapter 2, an intimation that language can be as unreliable as relationships. In this scene spectators are likely to register Hamlet's probable status as a revenging malcontent, since the appearance of a ghostly victim in the first scene has indicated that a wrongful death has occurred, and one that is of a momentous nature. The black-clad Hamlet, in the person of an actor recognizable to many as the most famous in the Globe's company, is set apart from the busy and colourful court scene. Of his first brief speech aside, Stephen Booth notes: 'With that line Hamlet takes the audience for his own, and gives himself to the audience as its agent on the stage'.[8] The line also hints at the deceptiveness of appearances, an idea then made explicit in Hamlet's remarks to his mother about 'seeming'. Hamlet's evident sensitivity to the relation between outward show and inward reality is likely to sharpen the audience's attention to both, and also to increase their confidence that in his case appearance reflects actuality: this is a unique effect, in the context of the dramatic illusions and strategic deceptions that characterize Elsinore on the Globe stage.

[8] Stephen Booth, 'On the Value of *Hamlet*' in Norman Rabkin, ed., *Reinterpretations of Elizabethan Drama* (Columbia University Press, 1969) p.150.

In contrast to *The Spanish Tragedy*, where the ghost of Andrea and the personification of Revenge act as a chorus introducing, commenting upon and closing the action, in *Hamlet* no layer of commentary other than the Prince's own intrudes between the onstage action and the spectators; there is no buffer between the audience and the experiences of the eponymous hero. Hamlet shares his interpretations of events in asides and soliloquies, and in speeches to the trusted Horatio. The latter at times becomes the spectator's surrogate upon the stage, modelling the appropriate reception of Hamlet's confidences. Rather than a highly characterized individual, Horatio represents the trustworthy and wise confidant of whom the Prince appears much in need, and his deference to Hamlet enhances the latter's status. Thompson and Taylor note that Horatio holds 'a special structural significance' in the play, in that he functions to connect its networks of characters. His unique position, Thompson and Taylor write, is confirmed by the fact that he 'is the only character who cannot be doubled'; also, he is 'peculiar within the play for being remarkably unmotivated (what does he actually want to do?) and for using remarkably flat and unfigurative language'.[9] The fact that Horatio bears witness in an undemonstrative way is, in fact, what makes of him an ideal audience for Hamlet, capable of fulfilling the final request to 'report me and my cause aright' (V.ii.323).

No point of view other than Hamlet's is sustained in the play, since other characters are presented through the prism of their relation to him and their demands upon him. Jeremy Lopez writes that 'Hamlet is a character we believe we know, mostly because we see and hear everything he sees and hears'.[10] This latter claim is not literally true, but reflects the impression created by the play that Hamlet is our eyes and ears upon the stage. This is the case with other dramatic malcontents whose point of view is dominant, such as Malevole and Vindice. Nevertheless, the Hamlet 'we believe we know' keeps surprising us. New plays in an established dramatic genre such as revenge tragedy clearly require an element of the unexpected to keep their audience engaged, but whereas Malevole and Vindice fascinate spectators with their ingenuity – turning unforeseeable events to advantage in the furtherance of their revenge plots – Hamlet generates surprise by reacting in a way that confounds expectations for his character type, and by performing not the anticipated dramatic actions, but

[9] Thompson and Taylor, eds, *Hamlet* Second Quarto, pp.157, 158.
[10] Jeremy Lopez, *Theatrical Convention and Audience Response in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge University Press, 2003) p.215.

unpredictable ones. The focus on his main task of revenge is not compromised, however. His sudden, unintended killing of Polonius is rather muted in dramatic impact; his reported despatch of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is even more distanced from the audience. Polonius is killed out of sight behind the arras, when spectators might have forgotten his presence because their attention, along with Hamlet's, is focused on the dramatic confrontation with Gertrude. The episode has also been given a metadramatic cast, since it is prefigured by references to Polonius playing the part of Julius Caesar, assassinated by Brutus (III.ii.99–100). As many commentators have remarked, it seems likely that the actor playing Polonius and the one playing Hamlet would have recently performed the roles of Caesar and Brutus respectively in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* on the Globe stage. The fate of Hamlet's old schoolfellows Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, on the other hand, is merely related as part of his explanation about the circumstances of his return to court, with his new perspective on revenge. Audience scrutiny is shifted away from these momentous and deadly actions of Hamlet's towards contemplation of another action that has yet to take place, because spectators' attention follows his own point of view.

A revenger such as Vindice, or a Machiavellian villain such as Iago or Richard III, establishes intimacy with the audience through direct address, in order to elicit sympathy for his grievances and admiration for his skill in defying his enemies. Critics who analyse the differences between Hamlet's soliloquies in Q1, Q2 and F generally consider that the directness and relative brevity of Q1 speeches appeal to a straightforward relationship with the audience along the lines of Vindice's or Richard III's, while Hamlet appears more speculative and introspective in Q2 and F. The latter soliloquies, it is generally argued, give the impression of a thinker puzzling out ideas for himself, as if we overhear him expressing thoughts as they form rather than communicating prepared arguments or propositions. Instead of boasts or bids for sympathy, we hear enquiries about the nature of experience, and expressions of uncertainty about possible courses of action. Dissenting from this view of the soliloquies, Bridget Escolme argues that the greater complexity in Q2 and F leads to an increasingly detailed and sophisticated relationship with the audience, rather than a withdrawal into an introspective, 'overheard' style. She writes that performances in the modern Globe 'clearly demonstrate that talking to oneself is an improbable way of engaging and securing the attention of the spectator', citing the close relation to the

audience achieved in the performances of Mark Rylance in the role.[11] Independently of individual performance styles, however, it is the case that the tragic self-consciousness in Hamlet's soliloquies is likely to produce certain dramatic effects, including suggesting that the Prince has accepted the prospect of being overheard. Elsinore is full of spies; his dead father, too, manifests an unpredictable supernatural presence. The theatre audience seems to become an extension of this indeterminate network of listeners, who are all implicated in his deliberations. Because of the dialogic nature of drama and the duality between the performer and his role, Hamlet is present in a meaningful way in the theatre as well as in the drama, with an individuality that strikingly distinguishes protagonist from plot. Hamlet is engaged, therefore, in the demanding task of witnessing and analysing, in alliance with the theatre audience, as well as in the even more problematic obligation to perform.

The predominance of one point of view has the paradoxical effect of complicating audience response. Through much of *Hamlet* there is a marked absence of unequivocal correlatives for a malcontent's grievance, such as those found in tragedies where corruption and injustice are self-evident, as in *The Revenger's Tragedy*. In *Hamlet*, spectators remain in a doubtful position alongside the Prince. Meanwhile, although much of Hamlet's wide-ranging debate expands his context beyond Elsinore, it simultaneously emphasizes uncertainty about what is taking place even within the confines of the court. Unease about the broadest implications of the revenger's role coexists with painfully specific questions such as that of the ghost's veracity, and the degree of his mother's guilt.

Accordingly, Hamlet's last request of his audiences does not resonate with the triumphant vindication of a malcontent revenger. Instead, it sends them out of the theatre with the task of understanding and validating the entirety of his 'story' (V.ii.333).

Hamlet as spectator

If Hamlet appears to possess a subjectivity that stands outside his role as wronged prince and bereaved son, as if he were a spectator of his own drama, it is the result of his evident compulsion to observe and analyse the nature of such roles. At the

[11] Bridget Escolme, *Talking to the Audience: Shakespeare, Performance, Self* (Routledge, 2005) pp.21, 55, 62–66.

beginning of the play, before the question of revenge has arisen, he is at an impasse, a malcontent who feels unable to either move into a new identity (such as heir presumptive) or recapture a former one (as student, or Ophelia's lover). After the ghost's revelations his course is inexorably set towards confrontation with the revenger's role; he is fatally entangled by the imperative to engage with the ethics and practicalities of vengeance. Hamlet becomes spectator as well as actor in his own drama by taking up a standpoint from which he attempts to establish frames of reference for the workings of revenge, and assess his own capacity and readiness to complete such an undertaking. Rather than committing to action, he observes events and engages in a search for truth, thus placing himself in a position analogous to that of the theatre audience. Seeking to know rather than to do, he not only moves between the *locus* and *platea* of stagecraft as described by Robert Weimann,[12] dissociating himself at will from the court and positioning himself at its margins (both literally and figuratively) as a commentator, he also creates the illusion of shunning the staged Elsinore altogether, and taking on many of the characteristics of an audience member.

Kent Cartwright stresses the volatility of Hamlet's responses to these challenges, writing that the Prince 'models an exaggerated spectatorship. His emotions swerve from the far end of passionate engagement to the far end of detachment experienced as lassitude', and 'Hamlet becomes alternatively engaged with and detached from his very destiny'.[13] This emotional turbulence would be considered a dangerous reaction in a spectator in the theatre, according to early modern ideas about the passions (as discussed in Chapter 1), and Elsinore is indeed alarmed by the Prince's response to its conduct. The emotive power of the dramatic leitmotif of revenge is evident here from two perspectives: the effect that contemplation about (rather than enactment of) revenge evidently has on Hamlet's sensibilities, and the audience's passionate engagement with the protagonist's experience.

In view of these metadramatic effects it is fitting that in his encounters with the players, Hamlet not only expresses strong views about drama but brings these ideas to bear on his central deliberations about revenge. Jeremy Lopez points out that

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[12] Robert Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater: Studies in the Social Dimension of Dramatic Form and Function* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978) pp.230–231.
[13] Kent Cartwright, *Shakespearean Tragedy and Its Double: The Rhythms of Audience Response* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991) p.92.

Hamlet's initial thoughts about theatrical performance when he greets the players are 'not about spectacle, but speech'.[14] We might add that Hamlet also seems to have little interest in dramatic action, as if in his view speeches about heroic deeds, and their accompanying emotions, are in themselves satisfying representations of action in the theatre. It is the speaking of verse, and the expression of passions, that appear fundamental to dramatic experience at Elsinore: 'We'll have a speech straight. Come, give us a taste of your quality. Come, a passionate speech' and 'I heard thee speak me a speech once – but it was never acted, or, of it was, not above once' (II.ii.368–373). In his second encounter with the players, he again begins with ways to 'Speak the speech' and is interested in the delivery of ideas and the communication of emotion, rather than the representation of action: 'O, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings' (III.ii.8–10). He offers acting advice about stage naturalism and propriety, and admires a play that is 'set down with as much modesty as cunning' (II.ii.377–378). Decorum and discipline are necessary, Hamlet seems to be suggesting, because in creating or witnessing drama we come face to face with something that is powerful yet fragile – its profound emotions can be reduced to 'tatters' and 'rags' – and it requires subtlety. Hamlet despairs of finding much understanding of dramatic nuances in the bulk of an audience, and instead emphasizes the responses of 'the judicious […] the censure of which one must in your allowance o'erweigh a whole theatre of others' (III.ii.26–28). His sense of isolation is such that he tends to envisage himself as that sole reliable witness among the 'whole theatre of others'.

Hamlet also assumes that audience engagement, though a communal experience, is created by spectators understanding what they witness with reference to their private selves and their own most pressing concerns (as discussed in Chapter 2). The public nature of the occasion lends piquancy and danger to private reactions, in that they bring the risk of self-exposure. Hamlet therefore predicts that feelings of guilt will overwhelm Claudius when he watches, in front of the court, a scene that 'comes near the circumstance' of old Hamlet's murder (III.ii.72). This theory that spectators will feel personally implicated by dramatic words and actions, and that their responses will be barely controllable, is first borne out by Hamlet himself when he reacts with

[14] Jeremy Lopez, 'Dumb Show' in Henry S. Turner, ed., *Early Modern Theatricality* (Oxford University Press, 2013) p.291.

anguish and self-disgust to the Player's speech about Hecuba. In the soliloquy: 'O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!' (II.ii.485–506), he condemns his own failure to articulate his grief, in contrast to the actor's powerful expression of it. Drama, even in the attenuated form of a single speech recited out of context, is challenging and has the power of breaking down those barriers that preoccupy Hamlet so much: between the word and the action, the internal and the external, the individual and the communal. Another of the barriers it breaks down, of course, is that between the real and the illusory: on the Globe stage, one professional actor plays the role of another declaiming a decontextualized speech describing grief, and the actor playing Hamlet – understood to be a bereaved prince who is genuinely suffering grief – responds with a more naturalistic speech fully embedded in a context and therefore accepted as 'real'. Yet Hamlet continually places before the audience an awareness that, as Peter Mercer puts it, 'the line between the dramatic intensification of emotion and its falsification is hard to draw and very easy to cross'.[15]

Contemplating his position from the perspective of a spectator, and dismayed by the responsibility to act out the revenger's script, Hamlet strives to intervene in his own drama by authoring as much of it as he can control. Yet once again his focus is on words rather than actions. He composes a 'speech of some dozen lines, or sixteen lines' (II.ii.477), which is intended to entrap Claudius, then instructs the Player how to deliver it, and enlists Horatio to help gauge audience response. Later, he conceives of his adventure aboard the ship to England as a drama whose authorship is disputed, in which he is caught still pondering the composition of his introductory lines while Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are beginning to act out a script prepared by others: 'Or I could make a prologue to my brains / They had begun the play' (V.ii.30–31). The metaphor acknowledges that – as is appropriate to his nature as malcontent commentator and self-observer – he prefers to construct an explanatory verbalization (in the form of a 'prologue'), but this is pre-empted by the summary actions of others. Hamlet narrates a description for Horatio and the audience of the decisive steps he takes in this crisis, presenting an analysis and justification of them rather than an enactment. Upon his return to Denmark, however, Hamlet renounces his attempts to write and review his own reality. His aim now is simply to react adequately to events ('The readiness is all', V.ii.200); he seems to accept, finally, that others are committed

[15] Peter Mercer, *Hamlet and the Acting of Revenge* (Macmillan, 1987) p.180.

to actions he cannot script and direct. Even the performance of his Mousetrap scene did not turn out exactly as he planned: although it produced some of the effects he predicted, he was unable to control the working of those effects upon himself, let alone on others, with his unscripted interventions in the performance threatening to destroy it.

Hamlet had evidently hoped that the play presented at Elsinore would act as a mirror in which the court would be confronted by its own corruption. This is an idea he takes more literally in his encounter with Gertrude, telling her 'You go not till I set you up a glass / Where you may see the inmost part of you' (III.iv.18–19). The challenge with the looking-glass is absent in Q1, as is the famous mirror imagery that Hamlet deploys in his advice to the players, where Q1 instead contains additional remarks about the performance practices of clowns. That these remarks are thematically related to the mirror idea will be argued below. In Q1, after criticizing clowns who extemporize by speaking 'more than is set down for them' (III.ii.37), Hamlet denigrates the type of clown who is known for repeating a set of pre-prepared jokes, who merely 'keeps one suit of jests'.[16] In this text, therefore, Hamlet complains both about clowns whose improvisations may be skilful but are to the detriment of 'some necessary point in the play' (9.27), and about those whose off-script jokes are stale routines, presumably scripted by themselves some time in the past. Lesser sees this as an anomaly, commenting that this 'odd vacillation' about the relative virtues of scripted and spontaneous work 'highlights what is often a productive tension' between text and performance.[17] Thompson and Taylor further note that in performance, this Q1 passage appears to encourage the actor playing Hamlet to practise a skill he is deploring – improvisation – by imitating the manner of the clowns he criticizes.[18] Hamlet's main message is a consistent one, however: he stipulates that clowns, like the drama as a whole, should observe 'temperance' (III.ii.7), a word that appears in all three texts of the scene.

It was observed above that Hamlet is concerned with decorum on the stage, and this is the ground upon which his opinion about clowns meets his idea of the mirror: he claims that acting should 'o'erstep not the modesty of nature. For anything so

[16] First Quarto, 9.29–30; all quotations from Thompson and Taylor, eds, *Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623*.
[17] Lesser, *Hamlet after Q1*, p.115.
[18] Thompson and Taylor, eds, *Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623*, p.114n.

o'erdone is from the purpose of playing whose end, both at the first and now, was and is to hold as 'twere the mirror up to Nature' (III.ii.19–22). The two uses of the word 'nature' in these lines[19] suggest that the 'modesty of nature' is the arbiter of decorum, while the 'Nature' to which a mirror should be held consists of truths about humanity or the world which, if drama is to have any value, it should faithfully reflect.

Decorum holds such importance for Hamlet because he associates it with authenticity, and with the lack of that pretence or ostentation that may otherwise appear to be the very essence of drama. Disgusted with appearances that do not represent an actual state of affairs, Hamlet requires that a performance should faithfully enact a text, which in turn should genuinely represent human nature. But even a mirror, though assumed in daily use to be neutral, can distort or exaggerate. Limitations to early modern technology meant that mirrors were usually small, far from flawless, and many were not plane or flat but convex; a mirror could certainly not be relied upon to reflect without distortion.[20] Mirrors are also as brittle as the deceitful flattery they may represent. Shakespeare's Richard II demonstrates this in a dramatic set-piece when he smashes a looking-glass to illustrate the fact that in the absence of kingly status, his identity is fatally fragile.[21] Like a play, a mirror can at best only transcribe nature in such a way as to provide a convincing imitation, and the image it produces is necessarily transient and imperfect. Hamlet requires that this image should nevertheless achieve decorum in the sense that it is aesthetically and morally satisfying and meaningful; he strives for something approaching this in the drama in which he is himself taking part.

There is another way in which an early modern mirror could not be regarded as a neutral, inanimate object. Theories of optics held that vision involved the exchange of some unknown substance between the eye and what it looked upon: 'Both optics and mirror lore in the period suggested that something was actively passing back and forth in the production of mirror images, that accurate representation depended upon

[19] The word 'nature' is given a lower-case initial letter at the first occurrence and an initial capital at the second by Thompson and Taylor, presumably to signal a shift in meaning, in their editions of both F and Q2. In the source texts, F prints both with an initial capital, while Q2 prints both in lower case.
[20] Roland Mushat Frye, *The Renaissance Hamlet: Issues and Responses in 1600* (Princeton University Press, 1984) p.282.
[21] *King Richard II* IV.i.276–291; Charles R. Forker, ed., *King Richard II*, Arden edition (Bloomsbury, 2002).

material emanation and exchange'.[22] This is the theory of extromission (from the eye) and intromission (to the eye from its object).[23] Independently of any idiosyncrasies of interpretation, therefore, Hamlet's glance into the mirror of drama produces an outcome that can be regarded as specific to his own outlook in a physical and literal way, even though he may hope to find support for it in the one 'judicious' spectator in 'a whole theatre of others'.

Hamlet wishes for a drama that shows 'Virtue her feature, Scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure' (III.ii.22–24). The imagery of drama's mirror is used differently by Ben Jonson's alter ego in the Induction to *Every Man Out of His Humour*, where the malcontented playwright Asper intends to use it to reflect only the deformities of society: 'I will scourge those apes, / And to these courteous eyes oppose a mirror / As large as is the stage whereon we act, / Where they shall see the time's deformity / Anatomized in every nerve and sinew'.[24] Holding up the mirror confers authority on the dramatist to direct an audience's viewpoint and guide their interpretation of what they see, even though spectators' responses cannot be controlled. That there may be a disjunction between what is represented and the way it is interpreted is central to Hamlet's concerns about the difficulty of reconciling appearance to substance, and suiting the action to the word. For the audience, it is Hamlet who appears to possess the dramatic authority, and to be holding up the mirror, and inevitably he finds himself obliquely reflected in mirror images on the stage: images of avenging sons are seen in Laertes and Fortinbras, to both of whom Hamlet compares himself, and also in Pyrrhus, in the Player's recitation, as will be discussed below. When Hamlet holds up Yorick's skull so that he comes face to face with an embodiment of childhood memories, another type of reflection is created that spurs him to conjure lost voices from the past – Hamlet's young self and a surrogate father figure complement the all-too-present voices of his dead royal father and of his mature, conflicted self. It is characteristic of the malcontent figure, with his emphasis upon the performativity of the self, that Hamlet is thus shadowed by figures who seem to multiply the facets of his dilemma and also

[22] Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Oxford University Press, 1988) p.8.
[23] Mary Thomas Crane, 'Optics' in Turner, ed., *Early Modern Theatricality* p.252.
[24] *Every Man Out of His Humour* Induction 115–119; quotation from Helen Ostovich, ed., *Every Man Out of His Humour* (Manchester University Press, 2008).

to fragment his understanding of himself, as will be discussed in Chapter 6. The boundaries between spectator and performer dissolve, as the watchful Hamlet finds himself impelled to respond to what he witnesses, while he remains under the gaze of friend and foe alike as the 'observed of all observers' (III.i.153).

Hamlet as performer

In the claustrophobic Danish court, Hamlet is aware that every act and gesture he performs will be watched. Keeping a wary eye on others is an essential yet problematic activity at Elsinore, a theme established at the opening of the play when the two watchmen challenge each other in the dark. Nowhere is the importance of maintaining watchfulness more powerfully suggested than in the staging of 'The Murder of Gonzago', where groups of on-stage spectators form separate interest groups, observing each other as well as the inset play. The theatre audience can see Claudius and Gertrude, Hamlet and Ophelia, Horatio and the other courtiers, all watching and being watched, while the travelling players too must be vigilant about the reception of their show.

Hamlet's is the most self-aware of these witnessed performances. As malcontent commentator, moreover, Hamlet is necessarily a double of himself; he both presents (like a stage manager) and represents the situation of an avenging son. Despite his declared antipathy to the phenomenon of mere 'seeming', he is aware of his kinship to the Player at a primary level of character: 'What would he do / Had he the motive and the cue for passion / That I have? He would drown the stage with tears' (II.ii.554–556).[25] The words 'cue' and 'drown the stage with tears' underline the performative and reactive nature of emotion. Drama involves the powerful expression of the passions, as suggested by the active verbs 'drown', 'cleave', 'Make mad', 'appal', 'Confound' and 'amaze' with which Hamlet both describes and enacts the potency of dramatic speech, paradoxically while claiming that he 'can say nothing' (II.ii.497–504). However, a dozen lines later he berates himself for speaking too much, and for being willing to 'unpack my heart with words' rather than take action (520). Ultimately, therefore, he asserts once more his mistrust of 'seeming' by rejecting the actor's eloquence as a sign of ineffectiveness. By calling the Player's performance 'a

[25]Quoted from the First Folio (1623), Thompson and Taylor, eds, *Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623*. The word 'cue' is missing in Q2 (II.ii.496), and theatrical imagery is absent in Q1 (7.408).

dream of passion' (487), Hamlet is evoking the notion that a dramatic performance is like a dream – a trope more usually associated with comedy (as discussed in Chapter 8). The suggestion is that by comparison with the circumscribed risks depicted in drama, with its implicit guarantees of resolution, Hamlet's experience represents the authentic and unresolvable tragedy of life. But this idea is complicated by the fact that, as Erika Lin writes, at the level of performance on the Globe stage, Hamlet's speech also draws attention to the reality 'that he, too, is an actor – the actor playing Hamlet. As his use of the theatrical term *cue* highlights, Hamlet's supposedly genuine emotions are merely the performance of the actor's scripted part'.[26] This elaboration of Hamlet's dilemmas turns the focus onto the spectator's own responses to the theatrical experience of being brought face to face with these issues of authenticity.

Hamlet's oscillations between acknowledging that he is implicated by the illusory nature of dramatic performance and claiming legitimacy for his experience, between admiration for the expressiveness of actors and dismissal of their inconsequentiality, arise from his problematic relationship with the role of revenger. The demands made upon him by the task of revenge, and his efforts to assert control over them, lead to a continual reshaping of what Peter Ure calls the 'wavering frontier where the individual is in communion with his role'. Committed to finding an appropriate way to grieve and to avenge his father, Hamlet becomes trapped in 'the gap between undertaking and performance' of the revenger role, and 'is continually looking *at* his role, measuring himself against it'.[27] Having from his earliest words in the play dissociated himself from 'actions that a man might play' (I.ii.84), Hamlet is engaged in an unsettling search for honesty in deeds as well as words. Looking for inspiration and guidance, he seeks analogues for his situation, but is so unconvinced by his own performance that he interprets each example he lights upon as a pointer to his inadequacies: the professional actor can speak more convincingly, while the soldier can act with unthinking courage. Another analogue that comes to his mind is extreme and alarming: the example of Nero can warn him against 'unnatural' cruelty towards his mother. Interestingly, despite Hamlet's distaste for the business of 'seeming', in

[26] Erika T. Lin, *Shakespeare and the Materiality of Performance* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) p.88.
[27] Peter Ure, 'Character and role from *Richard III* to *Hamlet*' in J.C. Maxwell, ed., *Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama: Critical Essays by Peter Ure* (Liverpool University Press, 1974) pp.33, 36, 39.

Gertrude's case he demonstrates faith in the transformatory power of role-play: he advises his mother to 'Assume a virtue if you have it not', since 'use almost can change the stamp of nature' (III.iv.158, 166). Applied to his mother these words carry a comforting moral message, but Hamlet meanwhile hopes to change his own 'stamp of nature', and to become a bloodthirsty revenger by mimicking one: 'Now could I drink hot blood / And do such business as the bitter day / Would quake to look on' (III.ii.380–382).

The exaggeratedly theatrical language here is another example of Hamlet's efforts to conceptualize his task as a performance in a play, for two purposes: to establish its distance from his 'true' self, and to forge a paradoxical kind of integrity out of his condition as reluctant yet diligent actor. The theatrical context is again evident when he claims in speaking to Ophelia that his father died 'within's two hours' (III.ii.120): this is indicative of the passage of time on the stage rather than in the court at Elsinore. And breaking into actorly verse after drawing a reaction from Claudius to the performance of 'The Murder of Gonzago', Hamlet makes ironic claims to being worthy of 'a fellowship in a cry of players' (III.ii.269–270). Indeed, Polonius praises his delivery of dramatic verse as 'well spoken – with good accent and good discretion' (II.ii.404–405). As a spontaneous performer, however, Hamlet demonstrates more affinity with the satirical Vice figure than with the revenger, and in extremis it is as the former that he instinctively casts himself. After the accidental killing of Polonius, he mimics the amoral humour of the Vice with the black comedy of his physical and verbal treatment of the dead body. His sense of alienation from his own impulsive act of violence pitches him into the exaggerated theatricality of the Vice role, which is closely related to that of the dramatic revenger but also draws upon the 'antic disposition' towards which Hamlet seems inclined: one of his first ideas in reaction to the ghost's story of murder is that he 'perchance hereafter shall think meet / To put an antic disposition on' (I.v.169–170).

A prominent feature of this 'antic disposition' is his enthusiastic embrace of wordplay, particularly the deployment of puns to ironic effect.[28] This indirect form of satire proves to be an effective weapon, as it is consistent with the malcontent's drive to

[28] Margreta de Grazia discusses instances where Hamlet is Vice-like in his punning, 'insolence', and sententiousness, in *Hamlet without Hamlet* (Cambridge University Press, 2007) pp.183–185.

castigate immorality; it is another aspect of the Vice's role that appears to pass Hamlet's tests, since it provides him with a means to express himself while at the same time guarding against self-exposure. His words can be heard and understood on one level by his interlocutors, but the audience understands them differently. For spectators, the illusion is created that two conversations are taking place simultaneously, an on-stage exchange of meaning between Hamlet and other characters, and a second exchange between Hamlet and the theatre audience.

From the beginning, Hamlet's favoured tactic against Claudius is to speak in over-precise terms: he is at pains to replace the king's obfuscations of meaning with his own obsessive pursuit of clarity about events and relationships. As Lawrence Danson writes, 'If Claudius's mode is the oxymoron, Hamlet's is the pun'.[29] Claudius speaks of 'mirth in funeral and […] dirge in marriage' (I.ii.12), and addresses Hamlet as 'my cousin Hamlet, and my son', yoking incompatible ideas together in a way that erases necessary distinctions. Hamlet's reply with the punning 'A little more than kin, and less than kind' (I.ii.64–65) is an attempt to disentangle Claudius's duplicities by quantifying this unnatural relationship, measuring it and setting up comparisons in order to clarify its contradictions. The use of puns foregrounds the mediating function of language, and the arbitrary way in which it yokes signifiers with signified. Wordplay such as Hamlet's draws attention to the fact that language is contingent, and he emphasizes its corruptibility, the fact that it merely 'seems' to represent reality, in a way that recalls the mediating function of drama. In his antic disposition, Hamlet brings together play-acting and language games in his effort to obscure certain truths and expose others. In his mocking exchanges with Polonius, he acts out the role of one whose search for honesty is so compelling that he must interrogate the elements of language rigorously, searching for literal meanings in the metaphoric or symbolic. He appears determined to force the courtiers of Elsinore to face up to precise definitions and pertinent responsibilities, and above all not to confuse mere signifiers with the essential matters that are signified. Even Polonius can respond to this by recognizing 'How pregnant sometimes his replies are' and 'Though this be madness yet there is method in't' (II.ii.202–206).

[29] Lawrence Danson, *Tragic Alphabet: Shakespeare's Drama of Language* (Yale University Press, 1974) p.26.

It is often noted that Hamlet's soliloquies are characterized by self-interruptions that abruptly break his line of thought ('Why, what an ass am I: this is most brave', and later in the same soliloquy 'About, my brains', II.ii.517, 522). As James Calderwood puts it, 'By means of these interruptions Hamlet, as though to transcend the solitude of soliloquy, generates within his own utterance a responsive audience. Interior monologue becomes interior dialogue'.[30] Furthermore, his soliloquies tend towards repetition and tautology, with numerous subordinate clauses and phrases deferring the utterance of main verbs; together with the interruptions, these speech styles enact a type of delay in their refusal to pursue a line of thought to a singular conclusion. In speech, Hamlet – representing the potentialities offered by the theatre itself – prefers to explore philosophical alternatives and to multiply possibilities, just as he is reluctant to commit to a course of action that would lead inevitably to the finality of revenge, bringing the drama to a close.

Delaying revenge

The reasons for Hamlet's delay have fascinated later generations of critics, but as remarked in the previous chapter there is no evidence that in the seventeenth century it was considered to be of great dramatic significance. The earliest surviving references to *Hamlet* associate the character and the play (or versions thereof) above all with a ghost and the necessity to avenge it. Delays consequent on Hamlet's doubts about the veracity of the ghost may have been regarded as judicious. Paul S. Conklin, who provides a history of *Hamlet* criticism prior to the discovery of Q1, notes also that motifs connected with the malcontent figure were felt to be important: 'seventeenth-century writers fastened upon Hamlet's malcontent musings with a skull', he writes, and 'The early prince was most decidedly a malcontent avenger'.[31] Conklin also concludes that Hamlet's madness 'was a phenomenon of special interest […] the malcontent was supposed to be suffering from a malady which hovered between melancholy and downright insanity'.[32] The seventeenth century, Conklin reminds us, 'knew the play, not as a book, but as a dramatic experience. Its prince was a histrionic one'. Conklin's conclusions are necessarily based on the 'widespread

[30] James L. Calderwood, *To Be and Not To Be: Negation and Metadrama in Hamlet* (Columbia University Press, 1983) p.156.
[31] Paul S. Conklin, *A History of 'Hamlet' Criticism, 1601–1821* (King's Crown Press, 1947) pp.15, 9.
[32] Ibid p.16.

echoes' of Hamlet's words and other allusions in print, since there is no recorded gathering of impressions of the character or play. Nevertheless, he concludes, 'It is safe to say that revenge, the ghost, and the hero of the play were connected in the popular mind as different angles of the same dramatic situation'.[33]

Hamlet's delay does not draw specific comment until the eighteenth century, when it is associated first of all with a practical issue: the necessity of avoiding the drastic curtailment of the dramatic action that would result were the prospective revenge to take place too soon. Not until the 1770s is there a development of what Conklin calls the 'procrastination motif' in connection with Hamlet's psychology.[34] Nevertheless it is the case that in all surviving texts, Hamlet places emphasis upon his delay and explores reasons for it. The soliloquy in which this is most explicit, and which serves as a climax to Hamlet's ruminations before his voyage to England is, however, recorded only in Q2: Hamlet's response to the sight of Fortinbras's army in 'How all occasions do inform against me' (IV.iv.31). In F and Q1, although Fortinbras appears at this point in the play, Hamlet is not brought onstage to encounter him, so no opportunity is created for comparing himself with this 'delicate and tender prince' who will 'find quarrel in a straw / When honour's at the stake' (47, 54–55). If this scene were absent from performances on the Globe stage, the theme of delay might have lost some of its prominence, but is still addressed by the self-questioning Prince who ponders whether he is a coward for failing to act (II.ii.506) and, after spurning a clear opportunity for revenge, expands upon his reasons for doing so (III.iii.73–96).

In more recent criticism, Hamlet's procrastination has aroused less attention for its psychology than for its function as part of the play's metadramatic exploration of the revenge tragedy genre. Support for the structural importance of the delay motif comes from Michael Goldman, who develops an analysis of what he calls the 'stop-action' dramatic technique occurring at several points in the play. This is 'where one or more players is stopped in mid-gesture and the action frozen'. Examples he cites include the Player's recitation of the moment when Pyrrhus's sword 'seemed i'th'air to stick', and he 'Did nothing' (II.ii.417, 420), and the broken-off performance of 'The Murder of Gonzago', as well as occasions when the soliloquizing Hamlet interrupts himself and 'orchestrates a stopped action', through which he 'draws attention to his

[33] Ibid pp.8, 7, 10n.
[34] Ibid p.63.

theatricality of gesture and language'. These moments are not, however, merely instances or representations of delay, Goldman writes, but a purposeful thwarting of spectators' appetite 'for a certain kind of completeness, a meaningfulness which we as members of the audience demand of action'.[35]

Calderwood, too, regards 'Hamlet's inexplicably stalled revenge' as 'a metadramatic reflection of Shakespeare's resistance to the structural syntax of revenge tragedy'.[36] Calderwood writes that this 'resistance' is resolved by a satisfying ending in which Hamlet eventually kills Claudius not once but twice, avenging first himself, using the instrument of his own death (the envenomed foil), then his father and mother with the poisoned wine. According to Calderwood, the first killing links to Hamlet's quest for individuality, in which 'Shakespeare had repeatedly advertised the apparent irrelevance of the middle of the play by emphasizing the fact of Hamlet's delay', while the second 'accedes to its generic form as revenge tragedy by binding the end to the beginning'. Calderwood goes on to claim that the second killing foregrounds the 'structural necessity' yet 'pragmatic irrelevance' of Hamlet's final revenge for his father's murder.[37] This analysis relies on a judgement that the play closes with Hamlet (and Shakespeare) resisting the logic of revenge until the last moment; that while the structure of the play dictates that revenge will occur, Hamlet is acting above all as an individual in revolt against the necessity to perform as an avenging son. As we have seen, however, Shakespeare has characterized Hamlet as a melancholy malcontent from the beginning of the play, before revenge for his father's murder became an imperative. He has been given the role of diagnosing and correcting a court where 'The time is out of joint' and his satirical judgements are much needed. Hamlet's much-contemplated delay provides a space in which the ethos of the Elsinore court can be examined from every perspective, alongside the dilemmas and implications of revenge – and metadramatically of the revenge-play genre itself.

Hamlet's most succinct expression of the revenger's passion, 'O vengeance!', is recorded only in the Folio (II.ii.576), where it forms a strikingly brief stand-alone line of verse. This climactic cry occurs after Hamlet has uttered the string of adjectives with which he characterizes Claudius as various kinds of 'villain', before he breaks

[35] Michael Goldman, *Shakespeare and the Energies of Drama* (Princeton University Press, 1972) pp.77–81.
[36] Calderwood, *To Be and Not To Be*, p.27.
[37] Ibid pp.46–49.

off to condemn himself as ‘an ass’ for such name-calling. As an interpolation in the Folio text, it is possible that the exclamation ‘O vengeance!’ reflects stage practice in later performances of *Hamlet*, with the motif of the revenger’s vehemence attracting – or being felt to require – further emphasis. It is also only in F that Hamlet draws an explicit analogy between his situation as son of a murdered father and Laertes’s similar position: ‘by the image of my cause I see / The portraiture of his’ (V.ii.77–78). The idea of similarities between the two bereaved sons is absent in Q2, and in Q1 the equivalent passage contains an expression of sympathy along with a denial that there can be any comparison between Hamlet’s ‘cause’ and that of Laertes: ‘methinks I feel his grief / Though there’s a difference in each other’s wrong’ (17.3–4). Again it is possible that there is a development in F that reflects emphases arising from performance.

However, to spectators of all versions of the play, structural parallels are evident between Hamlet’s situation as the son of a murdered father and the position of not only Laertes but Fortinbras, whose father was killed by Hamlet’s father (I.i.83–85), and Pyrrhus, whose vengeance for the death of his father Achilles is described in stirring terms in the Player’s speech in II.ii. This recitation by the Player is initiated by Hamlet himself, who further loads it with significance by claiming that it is the dramatic speech he ‘chiefly loved’ (II.ii.383). Another child of a murdered father is Ophelia, bereaved in the same way as her brother Laertes. But even if Ophelia could conceive a vengeful passion against Hamlet, as a woman she cannot become a malcontent revenger; as discussed in Chapter 3, she can merely mourn and succumb to madness. Her grief and consequent insanity are expressed by disorderly speech and behaviour that violate feminine ideals, and can issue only in effective suicide. The madness of the male revenger, while similarly self-destructive, leads primarily to threats and acts of violence.

Of the potentially avenging sons, Fortinbras is persuaded through the offices of Claudius to divert his impulse for vengeance on to ‘some part of Poland’ (IV.iv.11), and thus survives to inherit the kingdom of Denmark. Laertes is the hot-headed revenger who rushes to punish the wrong person for his father’s death but again, as in the case of Fortinbras, Claudius succeeds in diverting vengeful aggression aimed at himself onto another object. Laertes declares that he is ready, when he finds the perpetrator, to ‘cut his throat i’th’ church’ (IV.vii.124), in direct contrast to Hamlet’s

deliberation before the praying Claudius. Laertes's threats recall the savagery of Pyrrhus as depicted in the Player's flamboyant verse. Also, the fact that Laertes first mistakes his target and is then easily turned into an unwitting tool of Claudius's plots against Hamlet devalues any idea that there is honourable purpose in a son violently avenging his father. These unattractive, unstable and often ineffective proponents of vengeance provide an immediate context for Hamlet's circumspect approach to the role of revenger. But these are not the only characters against whom Hamlet's behaviour can be measured; even Claudius, though shown to be an astute survivor and adept at manipulating others, can if the delay trope is foregrounded appear to mirror Hamlet's own paralysis, as each fails to enact their desire for the other's death. Claudius's first attempt to rid himself of Hamlet ends in the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, just as Hamlet accidentally causes Polonius's death, and Claudius in the end requires a proxy to eliminate the danger posed by his troublesome nephew; the two adversaries are equally unwilling to provoke a direct confrontation. There is a further hint of dangerous indecisiveness in Claudius when he is struggling to pray, and finds that 'like a man to double business bound / I stand in pause where I shall first begin / And both neglect' (III.iii.41–43).

However, when Harold Jenkins writes that if Hamlet 'sees himself mirrored in Laertes, it follows and must not escape us that the same mirror shows an image of Claudius in him', he is referring to Hamlet as the slayer of Polonius, one who draws the guilt of a murderer upon himself. We also see, as Jenkins puts it, 'a sudden glimpse' of Hamlet in a regicide role akin to Claudius's own when he announces that the killer in 'The Murder of Gonzago' is 'nephew to the king' (III.ii.237).[38] But Hamlet is very far not only from being a calculating assassin of Claudius's ilk, but also from having the shrewdness to deflect Laertes's wrath as Claudius has done. His attempt to do so by means of a simple apology ('Give me your pardon, sir. I have done you wrong, / But pardon't as you are a gentleman', V.ii.204–205) appears alien to the state of affairs at Elsinore, as if he were appealing to the moral code of a different type of drama altogether. It also seems that Hamlet, so acutely aware that a man may play many parts, cannot accept that there is more than one role in the story of Elsinore that can be attributed to him. Having compared himself to an actor and a soldier in his struggles with the role of revenger, he shows little sign of recognizing that, in relation to

[38] Jenkins, ed., *Hamlet*, Arden edition, pp.144, 145.

Laertes, he has become the legitimate object of a revenger's wrath, as the perpetrator of a father's violent death. Nor does he see himself in the role of potential antagonist for Fortinbras, who at the beginning of the play seeks to avenge his own father and recover what has been lost to the Danish crown. As discussed above, such is the dominance of Hamlet's point of view that while the audience is given glimpses of these alternative facets of Hamlet's part in the drama of Elsinore, it shares his focus on the task of avenging his father, with the result that his status as killer and as potential revenge victim is obscured. Nevertheless, Laertes does exact revenge for Polonius's killing and Fortinbras does gain the Danish kingdom. Both outcomes materialize in the final scene as if they are dying gifts from a Hamlet who has at last achieved his revenge, at the cost of all else, and is belatedly directing the dénouement of the plot.

The previous chapter discussed those aspects of Hamlet that make of him a classic melancholic character, whereas here the emphasis has been on his status as metadramatic malcontent confronted with the imperatives of the archetypal revenger. The cyclical nature of revenge, a phenomenon of the revenge tragedy genre to be discussed in the next part of this study, is affirmed by the fact that Hamlet also ends as a victim of revenge. Having abandoned the attempt to author events, as discussed above, he nevertheless appears able to direct matters in his final moments, avenging himself upon Claudius and attempting to make provisions for the future; but he has been condemned by the actions of others to be a mere player in their drama, and dies as their victim. The logic of the revenge genre dictates that he should perish as a direct result of his act of vengeance, alongside his planned victim, despite all attempts to justify his actions. But the proximal cause of his death originates in a previous, unplanned act of violence that has provoked a desire for revenge against himself.

As this chapter has discussed, Hamlet as a malcontent is a critical spectator of, as well as actor in, the state of affairs in Elsinore, and his search for authenticity is spurred by an acute consciousness of the powerful metaphoric value of dramatic performance, with all its ambiguities. The meanings behind the performances that Hamlet witnesses in Elsinore at times appear unknowable to him, and while at other times they become transparent, they remain tantalizingly beyond his capacity to influence or remedy, just as spectators in the theatre may interpret or misinterpret the events and passions they witness, but remain powerless to intervene. The metaphor of the stage as mirror, too,

has acquired special relevance for Hamlet as he grapples with the responsibility of exposing the true state of affairs in the court at Elsinore. In order to create a faithful image of the truth, Hamlet turns to dramatic representation, seeking to harness the energies of theatre while addressing the questions it raises about integrity. In the theatrical performance as a whole, the audience sees reflections of Hamlet in other characters captured in his mirror. He is troubled by his own obligation to be a performer in such a setting, and by his failures of performance; his delay, whether or not a salient feature of the drama in the experience of the first audiences, provides scope for exploration of the structure of the revenger's role, the significance of ghostly incitements, and the logic of the revenge concept. The direct confrontation between Hamlet as revenger and the object of his revenge is delayed until the play's final moments, and this belated collision is complicated by the spectacle of other deaths and by the fact that Hamlet has acquired a dual role, being cast by other players in Elsinore's drama as the target of revenge.

The play in its entirety interrogates the script that the revenger must follow, his staged actions, and his relation to his onstage and offstage audiences. It demonstrates that the performativity of revenge actions exposes their inherent failures of morality and efficacy, but it also establishes the power and value of the enduring human imperative to challenge iniquity. The sustained intensity with which the play dramatizes this cluster of ideas attests to the fact that they captivated audiences, and indeed were to do so for at least another two decades on the London stage. In order to analyse this enduring appeal, the following chapters examine the ways in which the early modern concept of revenge, in its dramatic and social contexts, relates to the figure of the malcontent and shapes his connection to his audiences.

Part 3 The staging of revenge

Chapter 5 Ethics, justice and value

The malcontent's confrontation with the powerful often culminates in dramatic revenge, staged in spectacular style; in tragedy, the spectacle will be a violent one. The motifs associated with revenge therefore provide an important context within which to consider the development and reception of the malcontent character. The next two chapters of this study examine audience perspectives on the dramatization of vengeance – its conception, pursuit and enactment – and their pertinence to the theatrical presentation of the malcontent.

The framework of a revenge story, with its built-in conflicts and cause-and-effect pattern, is inherently dramatic. This theatricalism, together with the undoubted emotional appeal of narratives where characters suffer grievance and seek redress, perhaps accounts for the enduring popularity of revenge drama on public stages, a history that began with ancient Greek tragedies of revenge. These plays were adapted by Roman writers such as Seneca into works that became highly influential in early modern Europe when translated versions were circulated.

Revenge drama's popularity on Elizabethan and Jacobean stages is confirmed by the prominence of this generic type among surviving texts; Linda Woodbridge, in a recent survey, identified 48 extant texts as revenge plays.[1] Tanya Pollard gives a comprehensive account of the political and cultural conditions under which early modern revenge tragedy achieved pre-eminence, and writes that 'Revenge has a good claim to being the dominant theme' of the era's tragedy, becoming the most popular form of tragic drama 'and arguably of the period's drama altogether'.[2] She goes on to note that certain features that are characteristic of the genre – graphic onstage violence, black comedy and metatheatrical elements – were innovations by Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights, while the appearance of ghosts and the madness of the revenger have their roots in Greek drama and were developed by

[1] Linda Woodbridge, *English Revenge Drama: Money, Resistance, Equality* (Cambridge University Press, 2010) pp.xi–xiii.
[2] Tanya Pollard, 'Tragedy and Revenge' in Emma Smith and Garrett A. Sullivan Jr, eds, *Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Tragedy* (Cambridge University Press, 2010) p.58.

Seneca.[3] Scholars agree that while classical influences were important in forming the early modern revenge play, *The Spanish Tragedy* – regarded as the first commercially successful revenge tragedy of the period – was instrumental in popularizing the dramatic self-consciousness and characteristically metatheatrical revenge-enacting spectacles that became such striking features of the plays under consideration in this study. This chapter and the next analyse the development of these innovative features to sophisticated levels during the period, and their impact upon audience reception.

Lucy Munro, discussing generic conventions, points out that 'Each new work is a negotiation between an inherited form and current ideas and fashions'.[4] Playwrights adopted varied tones and styles in their contributions to the revenge genre, and these approaches correlate to some extent with the range of motivations assigned to their malcontent revengers. Some of these protagonists are depicted in a genuine pursuit of justice, with a desire for restoration of balance (such as Malevole and Hamlet), while others appropriate revenge motifs as a cover for vindictiveness and self-advancement (Iago). Some begin with legitimate grievances but are driven by grief and rancour to physical or emotional extremes (Vindice, and Marston's Antonio) or are caught up in the destructive plots of others (Bosola, Flamineo). On the periphery of the revenge action are aggrieved women, whose pursuit of retribution is circumscribed but nevertheless potent. The form of revenge tragedy is flexible enough to encompass all of these perspectives, and it is also resilient: its grotesque elements (especially depictions of obsession and violence), combined with an ironic self-consciousness about its popular status, tended to generate qualities that would at first sight appear intrusive to tragedy, such as overt theatricality, black comedy and parody, yet the genre embraced these qualities with a creativity that moved drama on to new ground.

Chapter 6 will consider more fully the metatheatrical elements – including role-play, ritual and satire – associated with early modern revenge tragedy, and particularly with the revenging malcontent. This chapter focuses on the malcontent's challenge to the legal and religious prohibitions familiar to audiences watching revenge plays on the early modern stage, together with the less clearly defined honour codes to which they were assumed to be sensitive. Ethical questions related to vengeance and issues of

[3] Ibid p.64.
[4] Lucy Munro, *Children of the Queen's Revels: A Jacobean Theatre Repertory* (Cambridge University Press, 2005) p.10.

justice and value are dramatized through conflict between characters, or within a would-be revenger faced with incompatible moral imperatives. The malcontent sets out powerful evidence in support of his own extreme remedies for injustice, and dares the audience to entertain radical ideas in a context where, as mere spectators of a fiction, they may appear insulated from the risk of retribution yet are nevertheless faced with the moral responsibility of accepting or repudiating a revenger's judgements.

Early modern ideas on vengeance

Religious and legal restrictions on personal vengeance provided one context for the public understanding and enjoyment of revenge tragedy. In early modern England it was acknowledged that where the law was incapable of providing redress for a personal grievance, the pursuit of a resolution was a serious matter, carrying political and religious implications. An often-quoted source for early seventeenth-century ideas about the relationship between revenge and the law is Francis Bacon's essay on the topic, especially his remark that wreaking revenge is 'a kinde of Wilde Justice', and an action that 'putteth the Law out of Office'.[5] Christian religious codes held that rulers were obligated to provide justice for their subjects, but were answerable only to God for any failures to do so. James I, as is frequently noted, was explicit in upholding the doctrine of divine right, and emphasizing the principle that authority for legal redress lay solely in his hands. From 1610 he issued repeated proclamations against duelling, prohibitions that were presumably necessary because extra-legal methods of settling disputes remained prevalent.[6] In tacit acknowledgement that these were sensitive issues, revenge tragedies of the period are usually set in foreign jurisdictions, and those in which the perpetrator of the original wrong has a tyrannical hold over the law. The focus is therefore on the dilemma of a revenger for whom the types of legal protection theoretically offered to subjects of the English Crown were not available.

In parallel with these legal aspects of revenge, questions of an ethical and religious nature arose. Critics who apply Protestant and Catholic theology to the issue conclude that the taking of personal revenge must have been anathema to the early modern

[5] Francis Bacon, 'Of Revenge. IIII', *The Essayes or Covnsels Civill and Morall* (Hanna Barret, 1625) p.19.
[6] Fredson Thayer Bowers, *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy 1587–1642* (Peter Smith, 1959) p.281.

conscience, since according to religious doctrines, violent revenge led necessarily to the commission of deadly sin. Arthur McGee, commenting on phrases in plays such as *The Spanish Tragedy*, *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois* which suggest that the taking of revenge can be a just action, writes that 'playwrights could talk of "just revenge" without placing audiences in an ethical dilemma, because they took this as a kind of diabolic double-talk which tempted the revenger to follow the road to damnation', and that consequently 'Revenge was all the more entertaining precisely because it was forbidden'.[7] But other critics such as Fredson Bowers noted that religious interdictions were countered in the early modern mind by honour codes, according to which those who have suffered wrongs must seek personal redress in order to maintain a sense of integrity and avoid social opprobrium. These honour codes also operated without regard to legal stipulations such as the prohibitions on duelling. A son who avenges a murdered father, therefore, may be condemned by both Church and State but nevertheless be regarded sympathetically in a culture that acknowledges contradictions between different kinds of duty.

Even the stricture maintaining that revenge usurps the power of God's appointed deputy is liable to become blurred where there is a question about the identity of this divinely sanctioned ruler. In the theatre, it could be argued that heavenly sanction might be given to Hamlet as rightful King of Denmark, or Malevole/Altofronto as legitimate Duke of Genoa. The site of the moral authority as well as the power to exact revenge or obtain justice can be hotly contested. The dramatic malcontent, by definition an outsider, can gain this authority only by challenging the dominance of others, and asserting his theatrical power. As Robert N. Watson puts it, 'The only recourse for a disappointed malcontent in the court of Renaissance culture is to inject cruelty and farce into its noblest undertakings'.[8] Revenge tragedy addresses the interlocking dilemmas of ethical, religious and legal authority and draws its power from the way these contradictions collide with the drive for self-determination. Bowers argues that playwrights could rely on spectators to be aware of these competing claims, and that the resilience of the honour code ensured that 'the

[7] Arthur McGee, *The Elizabethan Hamlet* (Yale University Press, 1987) pp.6, 12.
[8] Robert N. Watson, 'Tragedy' in A.R. Braunmuller and Michael Hattaway, eds, *Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge University Press, 2003) p.323.

audience at the theaters seems to have made the customary compromise between a formal set of religious and moral ethics and an informal set of native convictions'.[9]

It is clear therefore that although the revenge play developed under the influence of Senecan tragedy, in which ethical dilemmas do not intrude between the revenger and his object, early modern playwrights were drawn to the social, political and moral issues at stake. The culture embraced debates about such dilemmas and was stimulated by the dissemination of ideas associated with humanist thinkers such as Montaigne, which encouraged self-scrutiny. It had become possible to interrogate both honour codes and prescriptive religious rules, and to explore the consequences of coming into conflict with state laws. Montaigne approached the topic from a moral and psychological point of view; while acknowledging that 'Revenge is a sweet-pleasing passion, of a great and naturall impression',[10] he recommended moderation in response to personal injury. Revenge tragedy, however, is predicated on revealing what happens when such moderating ideals are unacknowledged, or overthrown. Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Maid's Tragedy* – probably played at the Globe in 1611 or 1612 – contains a speech in which Amintor succinctly expresses the three-way conflict between a perceived social duty to avenge a personal injury, a desire for religious vindication, and a humanist appreciation of the virtues of moderation. Amintor's reaction to finding that he has been duped into marriage is worth quoting at length:

You powers above, if you did ever mean
Man should be used thus, you have thought a way
How he may bear himself and save his honour.
Instruct me in it, for to my dull eyes
There is no mean, no moderate course to run:
I must live scorned or be a murderer.
Is there a third? Why is this night so calm?
Why does not heaven speak in thunder to us
And drown her voice?[11]

Such an explicit lament for the impossibility of a 'moderate course' of action is not often heard from the malcontent revenger, who is more likely to scorn such caution as

[9] Bowers, *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy*, p.40.
[10] 'Of diverting and diversions', *Montaigne's Essays*, Vol. 3, translated by John Florio (J.M. Dent, 1965) p.56.
[11] Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, *The Maid's Tragedy* II.i.222–230; quotation from Martin Wiggins, ed., *Four Jacobean Sex Tragedies* (Oxford University Press, 1998).

'Bestial oblivion or some craven scruple / Of thinking too precisely on th'event'.[12] An appeal for thunder is, however, a familiar verbal motif of the would-be revenger. It is often metadramatic in nature (as discussed in the next chapter) because of an implied reference to theatrical sound effects, but here Amintor is asking for divine aid in reconciling his conflicting desires to save his honour, to conduct himself temperately and ethically, and to obtain vengeance.

It is the revenger's excesses, rather than an ideal of moderation and temperance, that characteristically drive the action once the path to vengeance is embarked upon. Bowers writes that there is generally a turning point at which these excesses cause a malcontent revenger to lose the sympathy of the audience, and argues that a London audience would draw the line at 'treacherous' and 'Italianate' tactics such as the hiring of accomplices, since these would conflict with honour codes. When the protagonist took revenge, Bowers concludes, 'it was the method and not the act itself which was largely called in question'.[13] The excesses of the dramatic revenger are indeed unattractive when they emphasize premeditated and dehumanizing cruelty, and the wastefulness involved in destroying the good along with the bad. But it is difficult to maintain that audience sympathy is totally lost even to a revenger as ruthless as Vindice, since the motivations for revenge remain cogent throughout, and any countervailing force offering a less repellent type of resolution is conspicuous by its absence. As Katharine Eisaman Maus puts it, 'The revenger seems compelled to take purgative action – to cleanse his world of a terrible wrong – but the only way to do so magnifies the original atrocity'.[14] The stage is, however, hospitable to spectacular displays of this kind, which may have cathartic effects for an audience. The outrageousness of the revenger's actions also lends itself to the pleasures of black comedy and satire, as discussed in the next chapter.

In *The Spanish Tragedy*, the madness of Hieronimo was clearly one of the play's most striking features when first staged, as is evidenced by the subtitle adopted in 1615, *Hieronimo is mad againe*. The excesses of the revenger are strongly associated with madness, as in Senecan tragedy, although it is often difficult to establish the nature of

[12] *Hamlet* IV.iv.39–40; all quotations from Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, eds, *Hamlet* Second Quarto, Arden edition (Bloomsbury, 2016).
[13] Bowers, *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy*, p.37.
[14] Katharine Eisaman Maus, ed., *Four Revenge Tragedies* (Oxford University Press, 2008) p.xi.

the cause-and-effect relationship. Charles and Elaine Hallett argue that 'the whole structure of the revenge tragedy can be understood in terms of the revenger's efforts to free himself from the restraints that forbid the act of vengeance, a process that involves moving from sanity to madness'.[15] The difficulty with this reading is that the movement between sanity and madness is not straightforward, and indulgence in escalating vindictiveness may appear to be both symptom and cause of the revenger's madness. Several factors – grief for the murder victim, frustration at the absence of justice and the torment of the ethical dilemmas and practical problems that complicate the route to redress – combine to produce the disordered speech and behaviour symptomatic of madness. Many revengers preserve tokens associated with the murder victim – such as Hieronimo's 'bloody napkin',[16] Vindice's skull of Gloriana, and Hoffman's skeleton of his hanged father in Henry Chettle's *Tragedy of Hoffman* – which provide a tangible correlative for obsessive grief. This behaviour is characteristic of the malcontent revenger who, as Bacon writes, 'keepes his owne Wounds greene'.[17] These stark visual reminders may be a way of maintaining audience sympathy by keeping the motivation for revenge at the forefront of the action. They are also the symbols of an obsession that is allied with madness, but revengers proceed on the understanding that obsessive behaviour is the necessary step that will restore them to wholeness, and will re-establish psychological as well as moral equilibrium. As Vindice puts it, achieving their revenge will 'Wind up [their] souls to their full height again', since 'When the bad bleeds, then is the tragedy good'.[18]

In *Antonio's Revenge*, excess is itself an important motif. It is emphasized in Antonio's extreme melancholy, which manifests not only in words but in physical gestures of despair, such as lying on the ground in II.ii and IV.ii. Above all, excessive vengefulness is evidenced in his stabbing of the innocent child Julio in III.ii, after spurning the opportunity to kill the child's father Piero, his real target; Antonio prefers Piero to suffer the murder of a loved one. The horror of the killing of the child

[15] Charles Hallett and Elaine Hallett, *The Revenger's Madness: A Study of Revenge Tragedy Motifs* (University of Nebraska Press, 1980) p.9.
[16] *The Spanish Tragedy* III.xiii.85 stage direction; all quotations from Maus, ed., *Four Revenge Tragedies*.
[17] Bacon, 'Of Revenge. IIII', *The Essayes or Covnsels Civill and Morall*, p.21.
[18] *The Revenger's Tragedy* V.ii.7, III.v.202; all quotations from MacDonald P. Jackson, ed., *The Revenger's Tragedy* in Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino, eds, *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works* (Clarendon Press, 2007).

is emphasized by the preceding verbal exchanges, which confirm that Julio loves Antonio, and that he loves Julio. Antonio is true to his text of revenge, given by his father's ghost, which commands him to pursue excess: '*Scelera non ulcisceris, nisi vincis*' – 'Injuries are not revenged, except where they are exceeded'.[19]

This quotation from Seneca's *Thyestes* locates the ethics of the play in a classically pagan world. The type of ghost that is characteristic of revenge tragedies is pagan in origin, although some critics have attempted to assimilate these ghosts to Catholic theology (especially Hamlet's father's ghost, which seems to speak of purgatory). The overriding characteristic of the ghosts in revenge plays, however, is their otherness. Although they may speak in imperative terms when they demand revenge, they do not bring moral or religious clarity but instead add to the revenger's dilemmas; their alien nature complicates the moral and religious frameworks that may otherwise be assumed to be operating. Ghosts above all contribute to the spectacular theatricality of revenge drama.

Audience judgements, then, are formed in the context of borrowings from classical ideas, contemporary legal and religious strictures, and social codes such as beliefs about honour. When Hieronimo debates the morality of revenge in III.xiii, he quotes from both the Bible and Seneca, referring to both 'destiny' and 'heaven'. The fact that he feels free to choose among these concepts when he is searching for guidance points to the possibility of interpreting them all as human constructs and as sources of inspiration for questions, rather than answers. A.J. Boyle writes that what is striking about Hieronimo carrying a Senecan book and quoting from it is 'not only the familiarity with the Senecan text which Kyd expects from his audience, but the way that text is used dramatically, to afford a transition from the Christian view of vengeance […] to a non-Christian, more primitive code of "justice", the private execution of revenge'.[20]

Ideas about revenge as a dramatic genre

Alongside all these ideas about and conceptual frameworks for vengeance, there can be no doubt that audiences harboured strong feelings about revenge drama as a genre. As Pollard writes, despite its 'trappings of high culture, and despite the intellectual

[19] *Antonio's Revenge* III.ii.51; all quotations from Keith Sturgess, ed., *John Marston: The Malcontent and Other Plays* (Oxford University Press, 1997).
[20] A.J. Boyle, *Tragic Seneca: An Essay in the Theatrical Tradition* (Routledge, 1997) p.144.

complexity many playwrights brought to the genre, revenge tragedy quickly came to appeal to a wide array of theatregoers with its sex, violence and fury'.[21]

Bowers states that early modern revenge tragedy 'properly begins with Thomas Kyd's extant masterpiece, *The Spanish Tragedy*'.[22] The evidence for this statement lies in the fact that the dramatic ingredients which later shaped audience expectations of the genre feature prominently in Kyd's play: murder, a ghost, madness, graphic violence and metatheatrical elements. Supporting the claim that *The Spanish Tragedy* was profoundly influential is the observation that 'Throughout the seventeenth century it was quoted and burlesqued more than any other play, even *Hamlet*'.[23] It is clear that the generic elements that were so influential upon later dramas – whether or not Kyd's successful play was their originator in the English theatre – were not only functional in the working out of plot and themes, but gave pleasure to audiences and evoked powerful responses. *The Spanish Tragedy* has a direct relationship with the Globe plays in that it appears Richard Burbage, lead actor of the King's Men, was well known for playing Hieronimo: the role is listed alongside those of Hamlet, Macbeth and many others in the anonymous *A Funerall Elegye on the Death of the famous Actor Richard Burbage*. Familiarity with Burbage's interpretation of Hieronimo's role would doubtless colour the reception of his later performances portraying various malcontent revengers.

It is clear that by the late 1590s, the tropes of revenge tragedy were fixed in audiences' minds, since they were by then subject to parody. Ben Jonson lampooned the fury of the revenger in 1598, in *Every Man In His Humour*, which was revived by the King's Men in 1605; Cob cries: 'Now am I for some five and fifty reasons hammering, hammering revenge; oh, for three or four gallons of vinegar, to sharpen my wits. Revenge: vinegar revenge; vinegar and mustard revenge'.[24] At about the same time, revenge tragedy was ridiculed in the Induction to the anonymous domestic tragedy *A Warning for Fair Women*, which according to its title page was staged by Shakespeare's company just before *Hamlet*. The figure of Comedy characterizes the

[21] Pollard, 'Tragedy and Revenge' in Smith and Sullivan Jr, eds, *Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Tragedy*, p.58.
[22] Bowers, *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy*, p.65.
[23] Andrew Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London* (Cambridge University Press, 2004) p.168.
[24] *Every Man In His Humour* III.iv.45–48; quotation from Robert N. Watson, ed., *Every Man In His Humour*, New Mermaids edition (A&C Black, 1998).

scenes of Tragedy thus: 'some damnd tyrant, to obtaine a crowne, / Stabs, hangs, impoysons, smothers, cutteth throats' and then 'a filthie whining ghost, / Lapt in some fowle sheete, or a leather pelch, / Comes skreaming like a pigge halfe stickt, / And cries *Vindicta*, revenge, revenge'.[25]

Familiarity with the genre conventions of a play adds to audience engagement by providing a framework against which they can assess striking or innovative elements, and such shared understanding – as well as being pleasurable – can create new perspectives on well-known questions. Heather Hirschfeld succinctly sets out the 'theatrical and thematic obsessions' of revenge drama, listing these as follows: 'the nature of crime and punishment, the obligation of the dead to the living, the limits of earthly and divine justice, the place of the individual in an increasingly bureaucratic state, the interdependence of male honour and female sexuality, and, finally, the relation of acting and being, the stage and the world'.[26] Within these broad themes, however, the dilemma of the individual revenger must reflect the anomalies and contradictions that arise for ordinary audience members within society. In order to create successful drama to which audiences will respond, the story of the revenger should resonate with certain recognizable elements of general experience, condensing something with which the audience is familiar – such as life's conflicting demands and imperatives – into a dramatic dilemma that can be played out within the revenge plot. In this way the malcontent revenger appeals as both hero and victim of the forces at work in the play, and the audience can experience a creative dissonance between the presentation of individualized characters and the expected workings of generic plotlines.

Not all dramatic malcontents take to the stage within the context of a classic revenge play, but conversely all revengers driven by a grievance tend to fit the profile of the malcontent. They refuse to submit to the system of justice and social hierarchy of the relevant state because it has palpably failed them; they point out unpunished transgressions and commit their own crimes in the pursuit of retribution. In doing so they invariably draw attention to the personal, social and political failings that have created this intolerable situation. Revengers come into fundamental conflict with

[25] *A Warning for Fair Women* Induction 50–58; quotation from Charles Dale Cannon, ed., *A Warning for Fair Women: A Critical Edition* (Mouton, 1975).
[26] Heather Hirschfeld, '*The Revenger's Tragedy*: Original Sin and the allures of vengeance' in Smith and Sullivan, Jr, eds, *Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Tragedy*, p.200.

certain principles of their society, and demonstrate that to achieve self-actualization they must reject some of these principles and attempt to enforce alternatives. They are usually eloquent in conveying their ideas and pointing up their dilemmas to the audience, and one of the expectations attaching to the genre, as Janet Clare writes, is that 'In plays of revenge the revenger is humanized, his predicament individualized and, through the theatrical convention of the soliloquy, the audience has access to the recesses of his mind'.[27] One of the rewards for the audience is privileged knowledge about the revenger's psychological development as he moves through the experiences of grief (heightened by the memories that are triggered by relics and by ghosts), burning desire for retribution, and confusion or frustration over how to achieve a resolution, towards the climactic revenge.

The structure of revenge tragedy implies a triangular relationship at the heart of the drama, between the perpetrator of the original wrong, its victim (whose story may be related, and who may appear as a ghost or dead body), and the revenger. The links between the three characters, and between these and the theme of revenge, need not be self-evident, as is demonstrated in *The Spanish Tragedy*. Critics writing about this play often comment on the tangential nature of the relationship between the vengeance sought by the ghost of Andrea and that eventually pursued by Hieronimo. In *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Vindice accumulates motivations for revenge as the play progresses. By Act III, he has achieved the vengeance he sought at the beginning, but he goes on to pursue further revenge in response to multiplying affronts. In *The Tragedy of Hoffman*, the validity of the revenger's cause is not firmly established, since Hoffman senior was hanged as a criminal in accordance with an (albeit questionable) interpretation of the law. It is clear, however, that in most cases the familial relationship is at the heart of the revenge project; the family into which the revenger is born, and often the one into which he has chosen to marry, create a context that establishes the authenticity of the drive towards revenge. The son avenging a murdered father may also be a man forcibly deprived of his intended bride (such as Marston's Antonio, and Charlemont in *The Atheist's Tragedy*). In *The Malcontent*, by contrast, the context is purely one of power: in this tragicomedy, Malevole is a deposed duke seeking revenge on his political opponents, in the tradition of the disguised ruler. Even here, however, marriage relationships become a

[27] Janet Clare, *Revenge Tragedies of the Renaissance* (Northcote House, 2007) p.7.

central concern, with the reestablishment of marital bonds reinforcing the political settlement of the dénouement.

As mentioned above, an audience could expect the setting for a revenge tragedy to be a foreign one, and specifically a Catholic country of continental Europe – particularly Spain or Italy, which were associated in the popular mind with political corruption and injustice. Moreover, the hotter climate of southern Europe was believed to produce physiological effects that resulted in intemperate behaviour.[28] These factors made the excesses of the revenger, and the absence of state – or even divine – justice in the play-world more credible, and at the same time attractively exotic, to a London audience.

The personal corruption that attaches to the protagonist as he plots and enacts revenge was a less straightforward matter. Bowers accounts for the fact that the revenger almost always dies at the end of the play by claiming that audience sympathy was inevitably lost by the time the act of revenge was completed, so that the death of the revenger becomes the only satisfactory outcome. Charles and Elaine Hallett go further, writing that since the revenger is driven – or drives himself – into real madness, perhaps while strategically feigning to suffer from it, he loses any insight into his own motivation or the larger moral landscape, so that the audience is 'never invited to identify or empathize with the protagonist'.[29] Identifying with the madness or violence of the revenger may not be an effect sought or created in the playhouse, but considerable empathy is nevertheless undoubtedly created for a revenger who demonstrates that he alone can and must take action in response to egregious wrongs in a society – and by extension, a universe – that is indifferent to him and to justice. Audience understanding about this state of affairs mitigates the revenger's guilt, though it cannot simply vindicate him. The uncomfortable nature of this moral position (for both playwright and audience) makes it appropriate that the protagonist who embodies it is finally sealed in death, not as a corollary of lost audience sympathy but in order to confirm the self-contained nature of the play-world and of his deed. The death of the revenger enables spectators to call the play as witness for or against beliefs in a moral universe.

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[28] Pollard, 'Tragedy and Revenge' in Smith and Sullivan Jr, eds, *Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Tragedy*, pp.64–65.
[29] Charles Hallett and Elaine Hallett, *The Revenger's Madness*, p.126.

The case of Hamlet's moral responsibility is an iconic one. Hamlet is explicit that the promptings to his revenge come from both 'heaven and hell' (II.ii.519), and the fact that revenge is inhuman and alienating is emphasized in the theatrically bloodthirsty speeches of the player describing Pyrrhus (II.ii) and of Hamlet himself when he is invoking conscienceless revenge ('Now could I drink hot blood', III.ii.378–382). However, since Hamlet's final revenge on Claudius is not initiated by him, but occurs as part of Claudius's own plot, he is somewhat distanced from ethical responsibility for the killing of the king. According to James Calderwood, in the fencing scene Shakespeare 'has displaced the ultimate responsibility for action from his hero to the scene outside him'.[30] In many revenge tragedies, the metatheatricality with which the final reckoning is staged (as discussed in the next chapter) emphasizes the sense that drama represents a conflict of ideas, even more than a conflict between or within characters, and thus attenuates any moral condemnation attaching to protagonists.

Some revenge plays, rather than dramatizing the revenger's dilemma by portraying his vacillations and debates with himself, as in the cases of Hieronimo and Hamlet, stage the moral ambivalences of vengeance by dramatizing disputes between characters who advocate contrasting responses to similar provocations. In *Antonio's Revenge*, Antonio – the son of a murdered father – expresses extreme melancholy and anger, and believes that 'Patience is slave to fools' (I.ii.270), while Pandulpho – the father of a murdered son – at first argues for a stoical approach, even affecting to laugh over the loss of Felice. Both Pandulpho and Antonio use theatrical metaphors when discussing appropriate responses. Pandulpho aims to speak in a restrained and quasi-objective fashion as 'chorus to this tragedy' (I.ii.298); the acting metaphor, however, is more usually applied in a negative sense, as an indicator of inauthentic behaviour. Pandulpho follows up his reference to the dramatic chorus by contrasting his stoic attitude with that which an audience might demand of the tragic thespian. He explicitly rejects the madness so closely associated with the revenger:

Wouldst have me cry, run raving up and down
For my son's loss? Wouldst have me turn rank mad,
Or wring my face with mimic action?
Stamp, curse, weep, rage, and then my bosom strike?
Away! 'Tis apish action, player-like. (I.ii.311–315)

[30] James L. Calderwood, *To Be and Not To Be: Negation and Metadrama in Hamlet* (Columbia University Press, 1983) p.108.

Even Antonio, who is characterized by dramatic displays of misery, assures Mellida in their snatched moments together that he will not speak to her with theatrical exaggeration, 'will not swell like a tragedian / In forcèd passion of affected strains'. (II.ii.105–106). Theatrical postures are, as in *Hamlet*, the archetype of falsehood. When Pandulpho finally repudiates stoicism, saying 'Man will break out, despite philosophy', he again compares contrived behaviour to that of an actor, but this time admits he has been guilty of it in adopting his own stoic pose: 'Why, all this while I ha' but played a part / Like to some boy that acts a tragedy, / Speaks burly words and raves out passion' and 'I spake more than a god, / Yet am less than a man' (IV.ii.69–75). By metatheatrically drawing attention to the performance of the boy actor (the play was performed by Paul's Boys) the speech points up how ineffective both the stoic postures and the violent passions are, when the speaker – whether boy or man – is powerless against the evils that have been perpetrated. All responses appear both excessive (since, given the speaker's powerlessness, they merely emphasize the theatrical setting) and inadequate (in relation to the wrong that has been perpetrated). Pandulpho's laughter at his son's death represents an excess of passion similar in nature – if at the opposite extreme – to Antonio's, and is more easily changed in orientation than moderated. By the end of *Antonio's Revenge*, stoicism is rejected and violent retribution is finally taken, but it is notable that there follows no punishment (other than self-banishment) for the revengers, who withdraw to religious contemplation at the end of the play. This disengagement from the social group and repudiation of further action achieves the same kind of dramatic closure, however, as the death of the revenger.

In contrast to *Antonio's Revenge* and other revenge tragedies appearing prior to 1610, Chapman's *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois* and Tourneur's *The Atheist's Tragedy* create a sustained philosophical distance between the protagonists and the principle of revenge, and in so doing they introduce new elements to the role of the malcontent, to be discussed below. These two dramas have been described as 'anti-revenge plays' by Katharine Eisaman Maus,[31] and they may also be termed anti-malcontent plays. Also from the second decade of the seventeenth century are Webster's malcontents Bosola and Flamineo, characters who pose further challenges to ideas about the revenging malcontent by pursuing the wrong targets for unworthy reasons, but who are

[31] Maus, ed., *Four Revenge Tragedies*, p.xxiii.

redeemed by their resistance to greater evils. Both are plotters of a lesser type of villainy rather than primarily agents of revenge, and they become victims of the fact that others' revenge plots turn them into tool villains.

The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois, like the early acts of *Antonio's Revenge*, presents an onstage debate about the morality of vengeance, but here the proponent of the stoical approach takes a step further in detaching himself from the malcontent's traditional stance, by separating his disapproval of court corruption from his personal grievance over a murdered brother. As a means of resolving the latter issue, he favours the 'honourable' course of challenging the murderer to a duel. The proponents of violent revenge in this play are the two women bereaved by the murder, Tamyra and Charlotte. The latter responds to Clermont's resolution with astonishment: 'Send him a challenge? Take a noble course / To wreak a murder done so like a villain?' Clermont pursues this dispute in a similarly interrogative tone: 'Shall we revenge a villainy with villainy?' and 'Shall we equal be / With villains?'[32] Although Charlotte is urged by him to concentrate on her make-up and hairstyling (III.ii.128–142), she deplores 'bungling, foggy-spirited men' (166) and dresses as a man in an unsuccessful attempt to take revenge in her own person (V.iii).

It is not only the women of the play who fruitlessly urge Clermont towards violent revenge; Bussy's ghost is explicit in arguing that Clermont bears responsibility for obtaining the justice that is denied because of corruption: 'What corrupted law / Leaves unperformed in kings do thou supply, / And be above them all in dignity' (V.i.97–99). Clermont remains resolute in his own approach, however, and eventually succeeds in staging a duel. But no sooner is the guilty Montsurry mortally wounded than the play takes another turn away from the tropes of the malcontent revenger when the villain frankly repents, and Clermont responds with forgiveness, calling Montsurry 'Noble and Christian' (V.v.113). Clermont does not long survive this moment of reconciliation, since he commits suicide for reasons unconnected to Montsurry; he is informed that the duke of Guise has been murdered on the orders of the king and, with the demands of Senecan tragedy in apparent ascendancy over his Christian beliefs, Clermont takes his own life because he declines to live in a corrupted world without his beloved friend. The question of revenge for the murder of

[32] *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois* III.ii.94–98; all quotations from Maus, ed., *Four Revenge Tragedies*.

Guise cannot arise, since 'There's no disputing with the acts of kings: / Revenge is impious on their sacred persons' (V.v.151–152). In an echo of the conclusion of *Antonio's Revenge*, it is this time the women who withdraw to a cloistered life, avenged for their original bereavement yet freshly bereaved by the deaths at the end of the play.

The Atheist's Tragedy also features duelling, but in this play Charlemont, after first declaring 'Revenge, to thee I'll dedicate this work' spares his defeated antagonist upon the sudden apparition of his father's ghost, which urges Charlemont to 'Let Him revenge my murder and thy wrongs / To whom the justice of revenge belongs'. Charlemont makes explicit the reason why his submission to this command is painful, yet a moral imperative: 'You torture me between the passion of / My blood, and the religion of my soul'.[33] Tourneur's play is also remarkable for the fact that its malcontent and its prospective revenger are opposed to one another, rather than fused into the same character. This relationship is pointed up in the play's title and subtitle ('The Honest Man's Revenge'). D'Amville – the atheist of the title, whose tragedy the drama presents – is both the play's murderer and its malcontent, while Charlemont (the 'honest man' of the subtitle and the would-be revenger of his father) refuses violent retribution because of its unchristian character. His advocacy of patience is, like Clermont's, part-Christian, part-stoic but, interestingly, it does not oblige him to forgive. He makes his climactic statement upon the sudden reprieve that he and Castabella receive on the scaffold, after the unforeseen demise of D'Amville: 'Now I see / That patience is the honest man's revenge' (V.ii.275–276). In acknowledging the desire for vengeance, but disputing its methods, *The Atheist's Tragedy* challenges an audience who may be accustomed to directing their sympathy and attention to the type of powerful dramatic action that sweeps them along towards the violent retribution of a revenger. Here, although the demonic energy of D'Amville may enthral the audience, the dramatic contrast between Charlemont's passivity and D'Amville's drive and ambition points up the mechanisms by which the attractiveness of the malcontent is created. In the climactic scene, D'Amville suddenly reunites the two roles of revenger and malcontent, in an outcome presumably signalling divine intervention: he becomes a maddened revenger whose violence is unexpectedly re-directed against himself.

[33] *The Atheist's Tragedy* III.ii.30–35; all quotations from Maus, ed., *Four Revenge Tragedies*.

Cycles of revenge

D'Amville is unique in representing a closed circle of vengeance in his own person, by accidentally (or providentially) turning his axe upon himself. More usual is an escalating cycle of grievance and retribution that consumes multiple characters. Early modern revenge tragedies have little use for a simple linear narrative, because of the dramatic imperative to create some form of impediment between the revenger and his goal, and as a result they often emphasize the circularity of revenge. The revenger spirals into excess – whether of emotion (Antonio), cogitation (Hamlet) or violence (Vindice) – while events in the play-world move on and complicate the avenging malcontent's status as either hero or victim.

A theatrical effect created in many of the plays is that the revenger comes more and more to resemble the murderer he is seeking to punish. This process is most explicit in *Antonio's Revenge*, where both Andrugio's ghost, spurring his son to violence, and Antonio himself repeatedly use bloodthirsty language that echoes Piero's own. For example, in the wording of Antonio's threat 'I'll suck red vengeance / Out of Piero's wounds' (III.ii.128–129), the most significant factor differentiating it from a remark of Piero's is that it uses the future rather than the past tense, as Piero reflects on what he has already done: 'I have been nursed in blood, and still have sucked / The steam of reeking gore' (II.i.19–20). The play thus verbalizes a compelling link between past and future violence. This link is also dramatized in the present tense by onstage violence when Antonio shockingly kills the child Julio, and eventually Piero himself. The similarity between Antonio and Piero is further staged through nonverbal imagery, in the tableau that each presents when he enters after committing a murder: arms covered in the blood of the victim, each bears a dagger and a torch (Piero, in the opening stage direction; Antonio at III.iii.72).

The cycle of revenge usually involves retribution against the avenger, and not merely in the sense that, as remarked above, he dies at the end of the play. Chapter 4 discussed the way that Hamlet, while struggling to come to terms with his role as avenger of his father, inevitably becomes a revenge target after his accidental killing of Polonius. In *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Vindice's double nature as the victim bereaved by a murder and an active murderer himself is dramatized by the fact that he is hired, in one persona, to kill another of the personas he has adopted. The cycle of revenge is also shown to generate an escalation in the ferocity of violence, in which

the urge towards cruelty spirals out of control. In *The Duchess of Malfi*, the initial revenge plot to punish the Duchess is sparked by a non-violent act – indeed, an act antithetical to violence – a marriage; the spiralling nature of the subsequent cruelty leads to a final revenge that is carried out as if on the Duchess's behalf by Bosola, who was her tormenter and murderer. Bosola is an unusual case of a malcontent who begins by losing audience sympathy through choosing the wrong target for his animus against an unjust society, and allowing himself to be suborned as a tool villain, but belatedly changes his allegiance on the basis of evidence of moral worth. He completes the circle as the instrument of revenge for his own victim.

A cycle of vengeance is often sealed at the dénouement with the deaths of all the main characters. In earlier scenes, the plays dramatize the contagion of revenge in the form of a chain of events, where the vengeful impulse becomes displaced from one character onto another. The original murder victim cannot exact revenge but may only posthumously incite another to seek it – verbally in the case of a ghost such as Hamlet's father or Andrugio, and morally in the case of Gloriana's skull or Hoffman's skeleton. The play thereby creates what John Kerrigan calls 'a structure of obligation which modifies the economy of vengeance'. As a result, Kerrigan goes on to remark, 'the revenger who assumes the burden of another person's resentment suspends his own identity'.[34] This loss of identity is symptomatic of the loss of the revenger's human potential. He perforce becomes the malcontent whose worth is unrecognized and whose talents are unused, since he is required to sacrifice them in the cause of vengeance. He must do so in order to embody in his own person both the injustices suffered by the murder victim (literally, in the case of Hoffman, who suffers the same idiosyncratic death by burning crown as the father he avenges) and the blood guilt of the murderer, in becoming a murderer himself.

Motives and values

The dramatic revenger is well aware of his part in this cycle of violence, and consequently obligated to differentiate his quasi-judicial killings from the type of murder he is avenging. He does this by compulsively displaying his motives and his methods to an audience (onstage or offstage). This forms a stark contrast with the furtive concealment and blunt savagery that characterize the common murderer. The

[34] John Kerrigan, *Revenge Tragedy: Aeschylus to Armageddon* (Oxford University Press, 1996) pp.7, 8.

theatre audience therefore has a vital role to play as witnesses, and as interpreters of the symbolism created in the pursuit and eventual achievement of revenge. The revenge protagonist is driven by a desire that the means of retribution should fit the original crime, and he embraces a public ritualization of death. At the dénouement, he also craves the attention of another type of audience for his acts: the perpetrator of the original wrong himself, who is required to acknowledge the validity of the revenger's motives and the moral power of his triumph. Thus Hamlet kills Claudius after pronouncing him the 'incestuous, damned Dane' (V.ii.309). In *The Spanish Tragedy*, Hieronimo is insistent on his own identity and his self-consciously dramatic achievement: 'princes, know I am Hieronimo, / The hopeless father of a hapless son […] See here my show, look on this spectacle! […] And, princes, now behold Hieronimo, / Author and actor in this tragedy' (IV.iv.82–83, 88, 145–146). Vindice follows this precedent in demanding that his victims acknowledge him by name, telling the dying Duke ''Tis I, 'tis Vindice, 'tis I' and, in his mordantly satirical way, ironizing over the dying Lussurioso: 'Now thou'lt not prate on't, 'twas Vindice murdered thee […] Murdered thy father […] And I am he. / Tell nobody' (III.v.167, V.iii.77–80).

Although they form the lifeblood of revenge drama, it is precisely these features – the urges to personalize grievance and to turn retribution into ritual, together with the related tendency for cycles of violence to escalate – that are the target of philosophical and religious condemnations of private vengeance. Since he must operate in defiance of ethical norms and is supported only by poorly defined honour codes, the dramatic revenger's moral perspectives are necessarily idiosyncratic. In the case of *The Revenger's Tragedy*, many critics note the lack of 'positive standards' in the play as a whole (Castiza's virtue being not only isolated, but rather passive).[35] The play's pervasive corruption encompasses the degradation of Vindice himself, who becomes 'the malcontent rogue he impersonates'.[36] This is fitting in a tragedy that revels in its own metatheatricality, finding its reference points in dramatic tropes rather than Senecan rhetoric, classical precedents, or religious tenets. The site of moral value within a revenge tragedy may lie solely in the self-conscious rebellion of the malcontent revenger against a society depicted as irretrievably corrupt. He destroys

[35] J.W. Lever, *The Tragedy of State: A Study in Jacobean Drama* (Methuen, 1971) p.32.
[36] James R. Keller, *Princes, Soldiers and Rogues: The Politic Malcontent of Renaissance Drama* (Peter Lang, 1993) p.128.

one order but creates space for another, a potentially better one in which – because this is his tragedy – he has no part to play.

It could be argued that the revenger is therefore ultimately conservative, since he achieves an approximation of justice and (usually at the price of his own death) brings an end to aberrational violence and corruption; by not surviving his achievement of revenge, he offers no lasting challenge to religious and state prohibitions of retribution. A.J. Boyle writes that while 'Vindice's proclaimed satisfaction at the end of *The Revenger's Tragedy* is […] entirely Senecan', the important element that is 'not Senecan about this ending (other than the tone) is that Vindice is punished for his vengeance'.[37] Early modern drama, drawing as it does on the morality play tradition and under the influence of contemporary legal and religious codes, requires that the revenger, however fascinating his actions and however persuasive his arguments, does not emerge unscathed.

Similarly conservative moral values are evident in the fate of the women of revenge tragedy, who stand as repositories of male honour; their value as brides is often one of the issues at stake in the battles of the revenger against his adversaries. Seen primarily through the prism of their family or marital ties rather than as individuals, women tend to symbolize certain principles. As Marguerite Tassi puts it, 'They represent the voice of elemental justice, speaking not simply for their own integrity, but also for the integrity of their family, tribe, or community'.[38] Women are shown to be victims of injustice, but when the question of revenge arises they can only speak about it and put on a performance approximating to it (at its most desperate, involving cross-dressing), rather than act definitively and independently to obtain justice. Nevertheless, in speaking out, these would-be avengers differentiate themselves from women who simply mourn; as discussed in Chapter 3, the grieving women of early modern tragedy tend to be reduced to either silence or madness. Just as the male malcontent becomes an actively plotting avenger, the vengeful woman can move on from melancholy to verbalize a determination to seek justice, appropriating the malcontent's privilege of speech if not of action.

[37] Boyle, *Tragic Seneca*, p.183.
[38] Marguerite A. Tassi, *Women and Revenge in Shakespeare: Gender, Genre, and Ethics* (Susquehanna University Press, 2011) p.19.

Vittoria in *The White Devil* laments: 'O woman's poor revenge / Which dwells but in the tongue'.[39] Words are the weapons that female characters are expected to rely on, and the Duchess of Malfi specifically rejects this stereotypically feminine type of revenge when she says of her executioners 'I forgive them', and tells Bosola 'I would fain put off my last woman's fault, / I'd not be tedious to you'.[40] Women, as Vittoria demonstrates, can use words to provoke, to manipulate and to dissimulate if necessary, as well as acting as truth-tellers, but they cannot usurp male agency. Nevertheless, Bel-Imperia in *The Spanish Tragedy* and Tamyra and Charlotte in *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois* are women who not only speak eloquently of their desire for vengeance, but take steps towards it. It is Beatrice-Joanna in *The Changeling*, however, who most clearly manifests elements of the malcontent revenger's role, while failing to sustain it. The circumstances Beatrice-Joanna is resisting are a function of her status as daughter and bride, but rather than possessing tragic grandeur like the Duchess of Malfi she is depicted as petulant and obtuse. By the time Middleton and Rowley wrote *The Changeling* in 1622, the genre of revenge tragedy was mature and the audience could enjoy the originality of Beatrice-Joanna's 'revenge plot' against an unwanted marriage, which becomes fatally entangled with De Flores' designs. Her undesired betrothal to Alonzo constitutes the 'wrong', committed before the opening of the play, that must be resolved. Beatrice-Joanna's proactive plotting, such as the scheme for substituting Diaphanta on her wedding night, together with her habit of sharing her transgressive thoughts with the audience in soliloquy, recall the tropes of the malcontent. Her self-consciously dramatic performance in falsifying the virginity test also echoes the malcontent's skill in role-play. But she has little control over events, and less control over herself; the limits of her agency are starkly delineated by the men of the play and in particular by De Flores, who takes command of all her plots, eclipses her in the expression of grievances, and becomes the authentic malcontent revenger.

Wherever the balance falls between conservative and radical elements in a revenge tragedy, therefore, the audience is obliged to interpret the play's events and judge its characters on their own terms, including looking for evidence that supports the

[39] *The White Devil* III.ii.283–284; quotation from René Weis, ed., *John Webster: The Duchess of Malfi and Other Plays* (Oxford University Press, 2009).
[40] *The Duchess of Malfi* IV.ii.199, 218–219; quotations from Weis, ed., *John Webster: The Duchess of Malfi and Other Plays*.

malcontent revenger's idea of justice. As spectators witness the promptings of ghosts, the madness of the revenger and the aestheticizing of the revenge spectacle, their frame of reference is theatrical, and their knowledge of genre conventions both guides and challenges interpretation. This chapter has demonstrated that the values under scrutiny can encompass the classical and the Christian. An audience may begin to watch with a detachment similar to that of Andrea's ghost and the figure of Revenge in *The Spanish Tragedy*, but also become engaged with a providential outcome, such as Hamlet's sudden killing of Claudius, where certain moral principles are reasserted, albeit in a problematic manner. The audience experiences a share in moral responsibility for the dénouement through the closeness that is established with the malcontent revenger, and it is also the case that merely bearing witness to onstage events seems to implicate those who observe them and apprehend their contexts. D'Amville's remark after his murder of Montferrers points up this disturbing effect: 'those that saw the passage of it made / The instruments, yet knew not what they did' (II.iv.136–137). The 'instruments' of murder are symbols that are familiar, yet constantly unsettling, on the revenge tragedy stage.

As this chapter has argued, an early modern audience held certain generic expectations of revenge plays, interpreting them through long-established yet divergent cultural frameworks. Each malcontent revenger becomes the focus of spectators' interpretive decisions, challenging them to embrace and resolve a particular revenge predicament. Audience familiarity with the genre and engagement with its inherent dilemmas encouraged theatrical self-consciousness and self-parody. These essential elements are the subject of the next chapter, which discusses the metatheatricality of the revenging malcontent.

Chapter 6 Role-playing, ritual and satire

'Theatrical self-referentiality is the very essence, not some contingent feature, of the genre of English Renaissance revenge drama', writes Jonathan Bate.[1] One reason for the prominence of theatrical self-consciousness in these plays is that the revenges they depict are conceived and enacted as performances, a trope that appears fully developed in the first of the great early modern revenge tragedies, *The Spanish Tragedy*, but is perhaps most vividly exemplified in *The Revenger's Tragedy*. As remarked in the previous chapter, a malcontent does not necessarily take part in a classic revenge plot, but the revenger motivated by injustice tends to become indistinguishable from a malcontent, and partakes of his metadramatic complexity. Vindice fuses the roles of malcontent and revenger to produce a bravura performance of grievance and vengeance. Here, as in other plays, the malcontent revenger's determination to overcome obstacles and achieve justice generates self-dramatization; his actions become spectacle, and other characters are pressed into service as his onstage audience. The avenging malcontent thus provides the focal point for the genre's metatheatricality, and is identified with its specific processes, especially role-play and disguise, the fashioning of ritual, and the creation of a satiric commentary. These metatheatrical techniques – concentrated in, and complicating audience reception of, the malcontent figure – are the subject of this chapter.

Since the motivation for revenge is not only to punish but to communicate a message, the revenger structures and ritualizes his actions in order to endow them with meaning and significance. The culmination of the revenge ritual is framed within a masque, a play-within-a-play, a duel or another such action not only to heighten its significance, but as a climax to the revenger's efforts to assert control. The dramatic structure of revenge plays empowers the protagonist; although it is usually the prerogative of rulers to define the roles that they and others will fulfil, in the morally topsy-turvy world of the play the revenger plots to create a self-defined and circumscribed environment within which he can both perform effectively himself, and attempt to direct the performances of others.

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[1] Jonathan Bate, 'The Performance of Revenge: *Titus Andronicus* and *The Spanish Tragedy*' in François Laroque, ed., *The Show Within: Dramatic and Other Insets, English Renaissance Drama (1550–1642)*, Proceedings of the International Conference held in Montpellier, 22–25 Novembre 1990, Vol. II (Publications de Université de Paul-Valéry, 1992) p.268.

This chapter explores the impact of the metadrama generated by the malcontent revenger's performance, including the role-play and ritual that affirm the significance of revenge while also exposing it to scrutiny. The revenging malcontent, in creating his own narrative, turns his controlling gaze upon others, while avoiding the surveillance of those in power by disguising his identity or his motives. The adoption of disguise is a transformative process for the individual, and also one that reveals power relationships to be as contingent and subject to change as the roles that actors assume onstage.

The use of disguise does not provide immunity from the fact that all gestures and words carry consequences for those who utter them: a speech event or an action has a real psychological effect for its originator, as well as outward repercussions. This chapter discusses the process by which the identity of an equivocating protagonist becomes less secure when operating under alternative personas, and considers the consequences for audience response.

Disguise is a metadramatic device that represents the theatrical illusion in miniature, drawing attention to the actor and his roles. *The Spanish Tragedy* dramatizes the paradoxes that arise when a player represents actions that are intended to reflect 'reality': the dead bodies at the end of Hieronimo's play-within-the-play do not rise up to receive applause and to act in another performance on another day within the play-world, although they do just that for London theatre audiences. The chapter therefore considers the questions revenge drama raises for its audience about artifice and authenticity, alongside the implications of making a public spectacle of revenge. Scholars often point out that in early modern London, the playgoing public was regularly exposed, outside the theatre, to the performance of judicial executions, and the word 'scaffold' was applied to the sites where these killings by the state took place, as well as to the stage.[2] Public executions were intended to modify the population's beliefs and behaviour in two ways: they provided both reassurance (that wrongdoers would be severely punished) and deterrence (against challenging the structures of power). In the theatre, too, the revenger performs violent acts in an

[2] For example, Molly Smith in 'The Theater and the Scaffold: Death as Spectacle in *The Spanish Tragedy*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, Vol. 32 No. 2, Spring 1992, 217–232; Janet Clare in *Revenge Tragedies of the Renaissance* (Northcote House, 2007) p.26. In *Henry V*, the stage was supposedly an 'unworthy scaffold to bring forth / So great an object' (Prologue 10–11); quotation from T.W. Craik, ed., *King Henry V*, Arden edition (Routledge, 1995).

attempt to assert control and to send a powerful message. Depicting such actions on the stage opens them up to comment, either overt or implicit, and presents them as the potential target, as well as vehicle, for satire. The chapter concludes by considering how the satirical effects associated with the malcontent revenger – and with revenge drama as a whole – guided the responses of contemporary audiences.

Role-play and disguise

A process of transformation is involved when an aggrieved victim of injustice faces the challenge of becoming a revenging malcontent, with or without a disguise of identity. This self-transformation, which may be gradual or sudden, results in the would-be avenger adopting a role that was well defined on the early modern stage, as discussed in the previous chapter. The figure of Revenge in *The Spanish Tragedy* offers an iconic – yet unsustainable – model for an avenger's dramatic role-play. This personified Revenge acts as a type of Chorus, watching over and commenting upon the action of the play, and it is a figure without nuance: the embodiment of Revenge has no alternative identities (other than that of the professional actor representing it), and it admits no complicating or mitigating factors. Since Revenge is an observer and a dramatic framing device, it is positioned as if in alignment with the audience's viewpoint, and implies that spectators will have sympathy for – or at least a privileged understanding of – the ethos of vengeance, in defiance of conventional religious and state interdictions. While spectators may resist this attempt to co-opt their support, or alternatively accept the framing device as a mere dramatic expedient, the sheer power of role-play is demonstrated in *The Spanish Tragedy* by the success enjoyed by the figure of Revenge in creating a simple frame for complex situations and ideas. Throughout the play the stark inevitability of vengeance is inexorably maintained, despite the complications of plot and character created by Kyd's drama.

For Hieronimo, acting within Revenge's frame, the role-play he must undertake in avenging his son's murder is a much more complex matter. He raises questions throughout the play, first about facts, and then about how to respond to them. His revenge plan culminates in the set of roles he creates and directs in his production of 'Soliman and Perseda'. Performed in languages incomprehensible to both onstage and offstage audiences, Hieronimo's playlet throws all the emphasis onto its complicated action, in what appears to be a court performance but is instead (as the onstage audience discovers) a sequence of murders and suicide. When his plan has succeeded,

Hieronimo is at pains to connect the two aspects of the performance, and the reasons for it; presenting his dead son to the appalled spectators, he demands acknowledgement from them: 'See here my show, look on this spectacle!'[3]

Hieronimo is here pointing out the fact of his son's murder has forced him into adopting the avenger's role. The discrepancy between the part the revenger must play, and the part he is by nature suited to play, can be a painful one. Hieronimo's anguish indicates this dilemma, while Hamlet persuasively demonstrates it in intellectual as well as emotional terms. A melancholy malcontent would prefer to withdraw from a world that he not only finds distasteful, but regards as a source of moral contamination. The imperative of finding justice, however, sets him on a collision course with that world. He is forced to engage in intrigue, and ultimately in the brutal action of the revenger, in order to disrupt it. The process by which a successfully plotting revenger is created out of a melancholic victim of injustice is one of character transformation, and the dramatic revenger enlists the theatre audience as witnesses to his attempt at controlling this process through the deliberate creation of a new persona. This is explicit in the opening lines of Chettle's *Tragedy of Hoffman*, where Hoffman declares that he eschews a debilitating melancholy in order to espouse invigorating revenge: 'Hence, clouds of melancholy! / I'll be no longer subject to your schisms. / But thou, dear soul, whose nerves and arteries / In dead resoundings summon up revenge – / And thou shalt ha't'.[4]

Adopting an alternative identity through disguise is not simply an alienating experience; wearing a mask may involve an extension and development of the wearer's character, rather than merely obscuring or contradicting it. Role-play offers scope for the revenger to express elements of his own personality, including those that have hitherto been suppressed, and provides a spur to action as well as a cover for it. In *The Revenger's Tragedy* Vindice – given a long-awaited opportunity to act on his grievances – brings aspects of himself into both of his disguises at court, first as Piato and then as an exaggeratedly 'discontented' version of Vindice himself. The audience is witness to the fact that Vindice does not deny his true self in his role-playing, but instead claims a new freedom of movement and ability to express himself. Spectators

[3] *The Spanish Tragedy* IV.iv.88; all quotations from Katharine Eisaman Maus, ed., *Four Revenge Tragedies* (Oxford University Press, 2008).
[4] *The Tragedy of Hoffman* I.i.1–5; quotation from J.D. Jowett, ed., *Henry Chettle: The Tragedy of Hoffman* (Nottingham Drama Texts, 1983).

will pay close attention to the complex relationship between a protagonist and the image presented by a disguised character. Certain aspects of the disguise may be congenial or uncongenial to the wearer; there may be elements of an identity he scorns, as is the case for Vindice playing the role of Piato the court pander; there may be qualities that he consciously or unconsciously aspires to, such as Bosola playing the part of a faithful servant of the Duchess of Malfi. Disguise allows the malcontent to find an outlet for conflicting and contradictory passions, and may reconcile his hatred of brutality with his desire to plot violent revenge. When the dispossessed duke Altofronto plays the malcontent Malevole, adopting scurrilous language and behaviour, the role permits him to express his anger and sense of loss; he is a person of privilege who has had his eyes opened to disquieting aspects of the world through misfortune, posing as one who is a disaffected malcontent by nature as well as circumstance.[5]

Disguise offers a tenuous form of protection not only from the revenger's enemies, but from the potential damage done to his own psyche by his vengeful actions. Beneath his mask, he can attempt to establish some distance between his personal identity and the behaviour he is adopting, so that a space is created in which he can appeal for audience understanding of the dilemmas he faces. A character who is figuratively wearing a mask can temporarily put it aside, step outside the action and reflect on the behaviour he has pursued under cover of the disguise. Vindice does this when he remarks to his brother Hippolito that they have made of themselves 'strange fellows' and 'innocent villains'.[6] In many asides to the audience, Vindice expresses his disgust and anger at the contradictions engendered by the tactics he feels forced to adopt. By contrast, when Hamlet reflects in soliloquy on his own behaviour in relation to the role of revenger, he is lamenting the gap between his own personality and that of a ruthless avenger, and emphasizing his feelings of inadequacy in the face of the demands placed upon him. In the soliloquy that opens with the exclamation 'O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!', he compares himself to a professional actor who is able to articulate strong emotion, and thus confronts his own reluctance to succumb to

[5] The political aspects of Altofronto's status as a disguised ruler are noted in the next chapter.
[6] *The Revenger's Tragedy* I.iii.170; all quotations from MacDonald P. Jackson, ed., *The Revenger's Tragedy* in Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino, eds, *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works* (Clarendon Press, 2007).

the passions of the revenge role.[7] *Hamlet* provides a dramatized analysis of the processes involved in submitting oneself to the role-play of vengeance, rather than (as is the case with many other revenge plays) offering spectators the pleasure of observing a successful use of disguise on the stage. Hamlet's approach to disguise involves adopting the self-protective tactic of pretending to be mad, a stratagem that appears somewhat expressive of his true state of mind as he struggles to complete the work required of a revenger while failing to fully inhabit the mentality of one.

The process of embracing the identity of the violent revenger, however, is inevitably corrupting, as both Vindice and Bosola discover to their cost. Role-playing creates its own reality; as discussed in Chapter 4, Hamlet at times hopes to exploit this fact by mimicking a bloodthirsty revenger in order to force himself to become at least an approximation of such a character. Neglecting to maintain the psychological gap between the disguise and its wearer can have other negative consequences. A potent disguise can be a barrier to self-knowledge, distancing the wearer from his own moral awareness and acting as a cover behind which any deed can be rationalized. Garrett A. Sullivan, discussing Vindice, calls this self-alienation effect 'the dispersal of both subjectivity and agency through the adoption of disguise'.[8] Bosola is a more extreme example of this process, as discussed in Chapter 3; he appears to need more than one layer of deceit in order to hide his brutal acts from himself. At the point of the Duchess's murder, he exacerbates the self-estranging effect of disguise by claiming several different roles in succession, as the Duchess's 'tomb-maker' and 'the common bellman' as well as her executioner.[9] Ultimately, in his own person, Bosola can pity the Duchess and her children, and seek revenge not only for them, but 'for Antonio, / Slain by this hand; […] and lastly, for myself, / That was an actor in the main of all / Much 'gainst mine own good nature, yet i'th' end / Neglected' (V.v.81–86). In this piece of self-dissociation, Bosola is insisting on revenge not only for the actions he himself committed while in disguise, but for the fact that, despite all the psychological

[7] *Hamlet* II.ii.485; all quotations from Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, eds, *Hamlet* Second Quarto, Arden edition (Bloomsbury, 2016).
[8] Garrett A. Sullivan Jr, 'Tragic Subjectivities' in Emma Smith and Garrett A. Sullivan Jr, eds, *Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Tragedy* (Cambridge University Press, 2010) p.80.
[9] *The Duchess of Malfi* IV.ii.139–140, 164–166; all quotations from René Weis, ed., *John Webster: The Duchess of Malfi and Other Plays* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

damage thereby inflicted on him, his efforts in successfully inhabiting these personas went unrewarded.

At the end of *The Revenger's Tragedy* Vindice, in a moment of triumph, reveals his true identity and his responsibility for the murder of the Duke and Lussurioso. When he faces punishment rather than reward, he exclaims: ''Tis time to die when we are ourselves our foes' (V.iii.109). Thus he acknowledges that it is impossible to throw off his disguises in order to claim the benefits of his alter egos' actions without bearing their responsibility. This is an aspect of role-playing that is further discussed below. Vindice's temporary multiplication of roles has had the effect of fatally dividing him against himself. Interestingly, in *The Malcontent* Pietro diagnoses this self-divided condition in Malevole – in character as a discontented courtier at the beginning of the play – without any knowledge that this persona is a disguise adopted by the deposed duke: 'The elements struggle within him; his own soul is at variance within herself'.[10] Since the Malevole disguise represents the epitome of the malcontent type, this condition of self-alienation is presented as the essence of the malcontent's experience.

It is always a significant dramatic moment when an attempt is made to heal the divisions between different aspects of the self. Vindice conducts his revenge murders in disguise, but (as noted in Chapter 5) also forces his dying victims to acknowledge him in his own identity, a necessary step in rendering his vengeance complete and meaningful. With his cry of ''Tis I, 'tis Vindice, 'tis I' (III.v.167), he echoes Hamlet's 'This is I, / Hamlet the Dane', an assertion of identity that in Hamlet's case also contains an implied claim to be rightful King of Denmark (V.i.246–247). Since this is the state of affairs that could follow Hamlet's wished-for revenge, the claim is all the more resonant for its projection of Hamlet's psyche into a desired future. In moments when such declarations of identity are made, it is clear to the audience that there is an 'I' pointing to another 'I'. It may be Piato pointing to Vindice, or one aspect of Hamlet's personality asserting the hopes of another, or it could be an actor laying claim to his role. In observing a disguised revenger, spectators can recognize at least two co-existing characters, in addition to the actor behind all of them. A theatrical effect of seeing double, as if perceiving a visual pun, is created, an experience similar

[10] *The Malcontent* I.ii.24–25; all quotations from W. David Kay, ed., *John Marston: The Malcontent*, New Mermaids edition (A&C Black, 1998).

to the impression produced when an actor doubles a character, as discussed in Chapter 2. One of these characters may be a person who, in different circumstances, could express admirable qualities, while another represents an individual forced into a particular course of action to be worked out in the course of the play. Moreover, the good qualities possessed by the former character are confirmed by the fact that adopting an effective disguise is shown to be a skill that demands courage, presence of mind and imagination. No character demonstrates these talents more than Vindice, who successfully infiltrates the court through both his first disguise as the cynical and plain-speaking Piato, and his second as a melancholic and resentful version of himself.

Costume changes may sometimes seem a minor component of the process of disguise, as in the case of Vindice, but they would always have been striking not only because of minimal stage scenery, but because spectators were attuned in their daily lives to the imperative of interpreting information about identity and status that was encoded in clothing. Vindice demonstrates that clues to identity were not only visual; the style of speech used to create the new persona is also of great importance. Hippolito advises Vindice, when he is about to initiate a second disguise: 'You must change tongue. Familiar was your first' (IV.ii.26). Altofronto, in creating the persona of Malevole, designs his own soundscape, with '*out-of-tune music*' preceding his entry at the play's opening. His style of speech is also striking. As W. David Kay puts it, Malevole's 'scatological and animal metaphors expose the corruption and beastliness of Pietro's courtiers'. His 'rhetorical strategies' include 'direct vituperation, riddling allusions and metaphors, ironic catalogues, and vivid descriptions that gain credibility from the play's action'.[11] In character as Malevole, he adopts the speech patterns of his adversaries; he has merely to repeat back to Bilioso the latter's protestations of friendship or enmity word for word, in order to reveal his casual duplicity (II.iii.26–29, V.iii.66–68). With Mendoza, Malevole adopts a familiar tone parodying and elaborating upon Mendoza's enthusiastic embrace of Machiavellian plots, calling him 'good mischievous, incarnate devil' and 'friendly damnation' (II.v.134–137). Malevole's exaggeratedly parodic pronouncements, and his characteristically terse and strident prose, contrast with Altofronto's measured verse, where he admits that in his disguise he 'may speak foolishly, ay, knavishly, / Always carelessly' (I.iii.164–165).

[11] Kay, ed., *John Marston: The Malcontent*, pp.xx, xxi.

It is only with this latter speech, at the end of the third scene, that the audience becomes aware that Malevole is a disguised duke. In Marston's other disguised-ruler play, *The Fawn*, spectators see Hercules adopting his disguise, and possess full knowledge of his motivations and methods. *The Malcontent* creates a different relationship with spectators. It stages, as Kay points out, 'four false deaths, two of which fool the audience as well as Mendoza'.[12] The strategy of misleading an audience is generally more conducive to comedy than to tragedy, as in the sensational deception created in Jonson's comedy *Epicoene*, performed a few years later, where spectators who think they are in on the gallants' joke throughout the play are startled by the final revelation that Epicoene is a boy (rather than a woman acted by a boy). In *The Malcontent*, those moments where it becomes apparent the audience has been misled by appearances have a non-comic effect, making spectators question their judgement and their relationship to onstage events. This technique draws them into the play-world by involving them in its conflicts of perception and its difficulties of interpretation.

Disguise and misdirection are theatrical in essence, and their potential to be comic lies in their quality of child-like make-believe, and the sense that they transcend the familiar restrictions of the workaday world. These inherently dramatic techniques bring metadramatic self-consciousness to the fore, and if disguise is adopted in open view of the audience – as is the case with an avenger such as Vindice – its incongruities may provoke knowing laughter in spectators as they become insiders to a plot, as if conspiring with the revenger. The illicit freedom created by disguise may reinforce a sense of comic anarchy, and create the conditions for a satiric commentary, as discussed later in this chapter.

Rituals and metadrama of revenge

Disguise and role-play are among the metadramatic rituals that are characteristic of a genre whose very structure is ritualistic. The classic premise of revenge drama is that an egregious wrong has been committed before the play begins, and its unfolding scenes perform a ritual exorcism of that wrongdoing. From the first, the audience is required to take on trust the malcontent's account of the original offence, so the genre requires that his persona and message are powerfully persuasive, and that he

[12] Ibid p.x.

communicates with spectators in a way that enlists their support and sympathy. The nature of the past wrongdoing and/or the identity of its perpetrators are contested, but it is the malcontent revenger who takes up the metadramatic stance of appealing for audience sympathy. As with Hamlet and Vindice, it is usually at his first appearance, in soliloquies and asides, that the malcontent details his grievances – which may or may not be fully formed as the play begins.

In his quest for justice, the revenging malcontent directs a powerful gaze towards both spectators and onstage characters. Attempting to establish himself as both observer and director of the action, he appropriates the power to compel others to perform in the rituals of redress that he is preparing, although he struggles to control the resulting performances. The compelling nature of his project, despite the qualified nature of his success, reveals that social status and power relationships are fragile and contingent, drawing parallels with the fact that actors can apparently adopt any role (or multiple roles) on the stage. The power of the malcontent's censorious gaze and verbal denunciations imprisons other characters in their dramatic trajectory and captivates the audience, but his posturing also constructs restrictive roles that he is himself compelled to inhabit. At first it appears that he can escape these at will, but he ultimately becomes aware that, since he is increasingly subject to scrutiny in his turn as he closes in on the achievement of vengeance, he cannot escape the role of revenger and return to a former self.

The division of the self, and loss of established identities, that results from adopting a role or a disguise is similar to the self-estrangement associated with madness, as discussed in Chapter 5. The type of madness frequently used as cover by the revenger is particularly loquacious and performative. These characteristics point up the reciprocal relationship between the psychological effects of disguising one's nature – which involves losing touch with one's natural ways of speaking and behaving – and that loss of the self and its social contexts which results in the aberrant speech and behaviour characterized as mad. In later plays such as *The Duchess of Malfi* and *The Changeling*, the motif of madness matures into a symbol of the degeneration of a society in which vengefulness is nurtured; in the former play, the Duchess is deliberately tormented with cavorting madmen, while in the latter the madhouse forms a compelling context for the subplot.

Disguise necessitates a sustained separation of the self from a hitherto-accepted rationality that is akin not only to madness but to the experience of dreaming. As will be discussed in Chapter 8, in early modern culture plays are often compared to dreams. This trope can be taken as suggesting either that the characters onstage appear to be in a dream of their own, separated from everyday life, or that the audience is dreaming for the duration of the play, or both (as is suggested to comic effect in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*). In a tragedy, however, the malcontent figure who points out the absurdities and injustices of the play-world may at times appear to the audience to be the only character who is morally awake, while – in an ironic reversal – he is mocked by other characters for being a dreamer because of his rejection of the 'reality' they inhabit. The malcontent may himself declare that he is living through a bad dream, and, like Malevole, depict the forces ranged against him as nightmarish; Malevole sums up his catalogue of the corrupt and immoral aspects of Pietro's court by characterizing them as 'dreams, dreams, visions, fantasies, chimeras, imaginations, tricks, conceits!' (I.iii.53–54).

One ritual 'vision' or 'chimera' of revenge tragedy – not present in Marston's tragicomedy – is the ghostly victim of the wrong committed before the opening of the play.[13] In some cases, such ghosts are linked with dreams, and the capacity to correctly interpret the dream about a ghost is a moral test. In *Antonio's Revenge*, at Antonio's first appearance he tells of 'Two meagre ghosts' appearing to him in a dream, a tale that is deflated by the absurdly verbose Balurdo's response about a dream of ghosts who personify his obsession with figures of speech.[14] But Antonio later hears ghosts urging him to avenge their murders, and resolves to act accordingly (III.ii.125–129). In *The Atheist's Tragedy*, Montferrers's ghost appears to Charlemont in a dream, and upon waking he dismisses it as 'An idle apprehension, a vain dream', provoking it to return in earnest.[15] D'Amville, too, sees the ghost of his victim Montferrers in his sleep, and dismisses it as a 'foolish dream', moments before being presented with the body of his dead son, a foretaste of his impending defeat (V.i.32).

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[13] In *The Malcontent*, remarks Kay, 'Marston abandons such outward trappings of Senecan tragedy as the ghosts, the forebodings […] but he retains Seneca's dense sententiousness': Kay, ed., *John Marston: The Malcontent*, p.xxvi.
[14] *Antonio's Revenge* I.ii.106; all quotations from Keith Sturgess, ed., *John Marston: The Malcontent and Other Plays* (Oxford University Press, 1997).
[15] *The Atheist's Tragedy* II.vi.62; all quotations from Katharine Eisaman Maus, ed., *Four Revenge Tragedies* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

In both of these plays, ghosts are subject to parody. In *Antonio's Revenge*, Balurdo not only makes the remarks referred to above but complains of being in such a pitiable state that he represents the 'discontented Sir Balurdo's ghost' (V.ii.5), and he agrees to join in the revenge plot in exchange for a return to the mortal comforts of fire, food and clothing (67–77). Tourneur's parody goes further in *The Atheist's Tragedy*. Charlemont is mistaken for a ghost by Castabella, when he approaches as she is mourning him at his supposed tomb (III.i.74); Languebeau Snuffe disguises himself as the ghost of Montferrers, with '*a sheet, a hair and a beard*', as cover for his tryst with Soquette in a churchyard (IV.iii.57); and Charlemont finds and puts on Snuffe's discarded costume, using it to frighten D'Amville away from his assault on Castabella. This apparently playful subversion of the vengeful ghost motif perhaps has a more serious moral message for Tourneur, in support of the play's rejection of personal revenge on religious grounds. The 'genuine' ghost of Montferrers defies dramatic convention by twice urging the hero Charlemont to abjure vengeance and leave it to heaven; the first occasion for this advice is in the same brief speech that informs Charlemont of the murder (II.vi.20–23), and the second is when the young man is '*about to kill Sebastian*' (III.ii.29).

A seminal dramatic ghost that is neither Senecan nor easily burlesqued is the ghost of Hamlet's father. Being, as Marcellus describes it, 'so majestical' (I.i.142), this figure is expressive of dignity and sorrow rather than blood-thirstiness or satire. The fact that it shows concern for Hamlet's spiritual condition – 'Taint not thy mind nor let thy soul contrive / Against thy mother aught' (I.v.85–86) – while urging him to revenge the murder makes it less easily dismissed as fraudulent, or merely melodramatic; rather, it appears to represent the painful dilemmas involved in revenge, which Hamlet goes on to explore in full.

By the time Chapman writes *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois*, the generic conventions are so well established as part of a playgoer's interpretive vocabulary that it is possible to merely narrate the appearance of the ghost demanding revenge, and the ritual swearing of the protagonist to achieve it, at the beginning of the play.[16] The ghost of Bussy appears onstage only in the fifth act, to comment on the working out of the revenge story. The appearance of a ghost always focuses audience attention, and whether or not it is framed within a dream it throws into relief the relative solidity

[16] *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois* I.i.83–88; Maus, ed., *Four Revenge Tragedies*.

of other events and characters onstage. The figure of the ghost links the supernatural with the theatrical, in a way that is consistent with the other stage rituals of revenge tragedy such as calling for thunder in order to signal moral outrage. When Vindice demands thunder his call is answered, as discussed in Chapter 2. *The Malcontent*, on the other hand, dispenses with supernatural effects, and leaves Malevole's desire for thunder unfulfilled (III.iii.127). *The Atheist's Tragedy* takes the opposite course. When D'Amville hears ominous thunder he dismisses it as 'a mere effect of Nature' (II.iv.144), but the audience knows that it is no such thing: it is a theatrical sound effect, with a significance that D'Amville is intent on denying. The atheist is oblivious to all non-material aspects of his situation, including its theatricality; this obtuseness is a further indication that the playwright is distancing him from audience sympathy, in contrast to the seductively ironic theatricality of a Vindice, or the compelling intellectual engagement of a Hamlet.

The metatheatrical rituals of revenge tragedy climax in the elaborate ceremony of vengeance that typically closes the play. The scene has been set for a ceremonial event such as a masque, in which the revenge can finally be enacted. But there is still room for surprise in the working out of the tragedy, since the power of the antagonist may seem to be at its height: in *The Malcontent* and *The Revenger's Tragedy*, a ducal coronation is the occasion for the masque, and in *Antonio's Revenge*, the usurper's dynastic marriage is to be celebrated. Drama demands revelation, and the breaking down of disguises, in order to achieve closure. In *The Malcontent*, the protagonist must put off two disguises, as if reflecting its dual genre as tragicomedy; first he removes his disguise as a masquer, and then as the malcontent Malevole, in order to reveal himself to be Duke Altofronto. Reconciliation, instead of the threatened violence, follows this double disclosure.

The nature of Malevole's unconventional revenge plot was clarified for the audience when the amended play was performed at the Globe. It will be argued in Chapter 7 that Marston's and Webster's additions enhanced the metatheatricality of *The Malcontent* for Globe spectators; it should be noted here that one of the 'Additions played by the Kings Maiesties servants'[17] appears to address the expectations of audiences who were familiar with the type of revenge play that was replete with

[17] Title page of *The Malcontent* third quarto (William Aspley, 1604).

Senecan violence. Among those additions that scholars ascribe to Marston himself[18] is the soliloquy explaining Malevole's view that 'The heart's disquiet is revenge most deep. / He that gets blood, the life of flesh but spills, / But he that breaks heart's peace, the dear soul kills' (I.iii.156–158). These lines motivate Malevole's project of psychologically tormenting Pietro, which leads to the latter's repentance and the reconciliations that close the tragicomedy. The speech also helps to create a closer relationship between Malevole and his audience, in a play otherwise not rich in soliloquies or asides. When acted by the boys at Blackfriars, the play's novel approach to revenge was perhaps of less significance. The title of the play indicates that its original emphasis was on the character of the malcontent, and that – as in *The Fawn*, Marston's next Blackfriars play – interest centred on the story of the disguised ruler. In these plays, the concluding ritual associates the removal of disguises with reconciliation and reform.

In the revenge tragedies, however, violence constitutes the most powerful ritual of all, and the violence associated with the malcontent – especially a malcontent villain such as D'Amville or Bosola – is the most sensational. It is enacted onstage, and thus amplifies the tradition of Senecan revenge violence by eschewing classical decorum (which dictated that violent episodes should be merely narrated). *The Tragedy of Hoffman* and *The Revenger's Tragedy* show that even the malcontent who claims a measure of audience sympathy can indulge in premeditated and startling violence including stabbing, poisoning and more ingenious methods of killing. These acts are not only given ritualistic settings but their theatricalism is emphasized by the fact that they conform to thematic patterns within the play. The skull of Gloriana, disguised for use as a weapon by Vindice, is not only the long-cherished symbol of his grievance but echoes the macabre confusion over the identity of a severed head played out in III.vi; Hoffman's burning crown, his method of killing his first victim and the eventual means of his own death, re-creates the death of the father he is avenging. Tanya Pollard notes the 'recurring use of body parts as props', beginning in *The*

[18] Kay, ed., *John Marston: The Malcontent*, p.xvi. Charles Cathcart argues that Marston's 'augmentations' were written for performance by the King's Men, in 'John Marston, *The Malcontent*, and the King's Men' *The Review of English Studies*, Vol. 57 Issue 228, February 2006, 43–63.

Spanish Tragedy with Hieronimo's bitten-off tongue, and the grim humour associated with an 'increasingly exaggerated sense of the grotesque'.[19]

The ritual settings, and the black humour associated with the repudiation of all constraints, are a means of accentuating theatrical violence while at the same time distancing it from realism. Early modern audiences were not, however, permitted to feel secure in their understanding of the boundaries between the theatrical and the real even in matters of life and death. The period is bookended by two plays explicitly addressing the foolhardiness of such a sense of security. In *The Spanish Tragedy* Hieronimo delights in revealing that his bloody revenge was not a court entertainment that was 'fabulously counterfeit' (IV.iv.76), but a series of murders and a suicide carried out under cover of drama, while in Philip Massinger's *The Roman Actor* (1626), Paris meets his death at the hands of the emperor under the pretence that both are acting in a play called 'The False Servant'. With this layering of performances, primary representations are imposed upon and supersede subordinate ones, so that they appropriate the status of 'reality'.

Robert N. Watson has suggested that theatrical framing of this type, whether complex or straightforward, creates 'an aesthetic distance' so that the enactment of revenge through dramatic rituals such as masques and plays-within-the-play 'may constitute an acknowledgment that such satisfactions are allowable and feasible only within a frame of fantasy'.[20] It is true that within such a frame, fantasy interpretations can be maintained, such as Vindice's incautious boast that his revenge plot was 'somewhat witty-carried' (V.iii.97), or the incongruously religious language of the ghost of Andrugio in *Antonio's Revenge*. This ghost, a spectator at the scene of Piero's torture and death, responds to the violent spectacle with: 'Blessed be thy hand! I taste the joys of heaven / Viewing my son triumph in his black blood' (V.iii.68–69). This reference to the physical substance associated with Antonio's humour (his melancholy), along with an implied claim to approval from heaven, draws together some of the customary rationalizations of revenge in a way that disregards the legal and moral complexities that exist outside the theatrical frame. As has been noted

[19] Tanya Pollard, 'Tragedy and Revenge' in Emma Smith and Garrett A. Sullivan Jr, eds, *Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Tragedy* (Cambridge University Press, 2010) p.66.
[20] Robert N. Watson, 'Tragedy' in A.R. Braunmuller and Michael Hattaway, eds, *Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge University Press, 2003) p.315.

above, however, in most revenge plays the revenger does not go unpunished, and for the theatre audience the outermost frame is closed by his sacrificial death.

While a revenger's deeds may ultimately meet with punishment, his words are always resonant in the theatre, and his judgements hold sway as the play unfolds. When he acts as a commentator, the malcontent revenger dissolves boundaries between stage and audience, becoming an intermediary and even at times a representative of the spectators onstage, in that he pursues resolutions to the most pressing questions raised by the drama. In some moments he resembles a dramatist in his powers of discernment and his mastery over events, and he is also a self-dramatist in his determination to project his wrongs and impose his own solutions. The malcontent revenger may delight in and embrace his alienation and cunning, and even his violence, as does Vindice; or he may lament his alienation and shrink from violence, like Hamlet. If the former, he acquires the comic features of the medieval Vice, as a consequence of his wit, his manipulative skills and his talents for improvisation. He also generates satire, through his outrageous speech and behaviour, and the grotesqueness of the violent spectacle he stages. At the other end of the spectrum, Hamlet is also a satirist in his damning analysis of the situation at the Danish court, but he is conscious of the contradictions in his position as malcontent critic, and of both the creative and the destructive effects of satirical commentary.

Revenge tragedy as satire

MacDonald P. Jackson writes that '*The Revenger's Tragedy* is like a version [of *Hamlet*] by Yorick – as jester and as skull'.[21] The extraordinarily dark humour with which Vindice satirizes and seeks to punish the vices personified by the ducal family emphasizes not only the damage they do but the fact that they are exposed to eternal judgement. Vindice questions neither the ethics of revenge nor his ability – once he has access to the court – to achieve it; instead, he becomes a satirical tempter, appearing to facilitate evil while drawing the evil-doers ever closer to destruction. He sets himself up as a determinedly profane agent of divine judgement, appealing several times for thunder to signal retribution from a heaven that he apostrophizes as 'O, thou almighty patience!' (IV.iv.193). Vindice takes it upon himself to circumvent

[21] Jackson, ed., *The Revenger's Tragedy* in Taylor and Lavagnino, eds, *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works* p.543.

heaven's patience and to 'hurry, hurry, hurry' his victims on 'to the devil' (II.i.200–202).

In this play Middleton foregrounds the satire embodied by Vindice and the black comedy of its horrifying yet incompetent villains. For early modern audiences, however, it was Marston who was most associated with the satirical style. Around the time of Archbishop Whitgift's 1599 prohibition on the type of verse satire for which Marston was well known, the boys' theatres came to prominence. Marston wrote for these companies, finding an outlet for his satirical critiques of society in the form of drama. Since satire aims at exposing and thereby curbing immoral behaviour and attitudes, it correlates closely with the workings of the revenge plot, which likewise focuses on the revelation and punishment of wrongdoing. The dramatic revenger and the satirist are both armed with painfully probing words. In *The Malcontent*, Malevole's invective as a scourge of vice marks him out as the epitome of the malcontent satirist. As noted above, aggressive denunciations are a potent weapon and his chosen means of revenge. One side of a revenger's character is that of the hero fighting for truth and justice, but the clarity of this stance is more difficult to maintain amid the tumult of revenge drama than it is for the relatively detached voice of literary satire, since the revenger is obliged to act out his challenge to entrenched power, and thereby to involve himself in a corrupt world.

The plot structure of revenge drama, as well as providing a framework for satirical voices, can itself be satirized. Since its outline and motifs appear pre-scripted, revenge drama is conducive to satiric self-consciousness, and it thus has a propensity for parody and an exaggerated theatricality. Prominent examples of self-directed satire in the genre include the treatment of motifs such as ghosts and skulls, discussed above; ironic comments such as Delio's remarks at the opening of the third act of *The Duchess of Malfi* about the passage of theatrical time (the Duchess seems to have become the mother of her second and third children 'within this half-hour', III.i.11); and amplifications such as the doubling of the masque at the end of *The Revenger's Tragedy*. Here, the revenge plot of the second set of masquers is anticipated by the better-prepared plot of those who preceded them. The thwarted masquers' discomfiture, as they '*all start out of their measure*' (V.iii.48), is a comic deflation of the characters' own assumptions about the genre in which they are performing. As A.J.

Boyle writes, 'the metatheatrical idiom of Renaissance drama has become part of the dramatic subject-matter' of the play.[22]

In *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois*, the stoical Clermont expounds upon the fact that both the theatre and philosophy can reduce (or elevate) any circumstance to mirth and satire. His 'virtuous digression' on this topic is in answer to the question 'is not all the world esteemed a stage?' (I.i.330–375), so it can be considered a direct rejoinder to Jaques's famous set-piece in *As You Like It* (discussed in Chapter 8). Clermont satirizes those who express either triumph or despair at life's vicissitudes, on the grounds that all such states can be counterfeited by 'an expert actor', and laughed at by a 'splenative philosopher'. Clermont's insistence on the illusory and transitory nature of human experience, and his metatheatrical means of expressing this idea, are characteristic of early modern drama. When characters are in disguise, matters of life and death can become subject to satire: Vindice, in his second persona, is ordered to kill his first, Piato, and is forced to devise a new mini-plot in order to simulate this murder; Malevole and the reformed Pietro, when both are in disguise, compare notes on the ways in which they are commanded to poison each other. The excessive and indiscriminate brutality of the villains who incite the murders is satirized: it is shown to be ineffective, as well as immoral.

The self-reflexiveness of the drama ensures that the malcontent revenger himself does not escape satirical comment. Audiences are invited to scrutinize not only his actions but the substance of his grievances and his chosen methods of articulating them. Since he tends to reject all constraint, and to take full advantage of the malcontent's licence for free speech, he plunges into excesses – verbal and otherwise – which satirize his attachment to his own principles. Spectators are forced to consider the grounds on which he seizes justice into his own hands, and the cogency of his powerfully expressed moral judgements. The satirizing of the revenger and his project has implications for the reception of the whole drama. What Nicholas Brooke called the 'horrid laughter'[23] evoked by the excesses of the revenger is tempered by the imperative to consider exactly what it is that the revenger is reducing to a ridiculous as well as horrifying spectacle, and where true value lies.

[22] A.J. Boyle, *Tragic Seneca: An Essay in the Theatrical Tradition* (Routledge, 1997) p.201.
[23] Nicholas Brooke, *Horrid Laughter in Jacobean Tragedy* (Open Books, 1979).

Antonio's Revenge stands out as a play that magnifies both the ridiculous and the horrifying aspects of revenge tragedy, with its displays of excessive emotion, helpless victimhood, and outrageous violence. Many commentators – noting Marston's reputation as a satirist and his involvement in the politics of theatrical rivalries – have interpreted the play as a starkly satiric commentary upon the whole genre of revenge tragedy. As Rebecca Yearling writes, the play is a 'compendium of familiar Elizabethan dramatic tropes and characters'; it is 'allusive, metatheatrical and tonally mixed' and 'also highly melodramatic and sensationalist'.[24] In this interpretation, the excesses of *Antonio's Revenge* are a means of concentrating audience response on the artifice and arbitrariness of familiar revenge tropes, and Marston 'is deliberately experimenting with dramatic form, questioning the assumptions that audiences bring to the established genres'; the play even goes so far as to critique 'the tastes and morality of its own spectators'.[25] Barbara J. Baines, invoking the engagement/ detachment model discussed in Chapter 2, writes that 'Marston deliberately drives a wedge between the audience's emotional response to and its moral judgment of the revenge protagonist'. The play's metadrama 'detaches the audience from the characters, and thus makes possible the parodic dimension of the play and Marston's critical assessment of the genre to which it belongs'.[26] The fact that *Antonio's Revenge* abounds in plot similarities with *Hamlet*, and other echoes of Shakespeare's tragedy, has also fuelled critics' speculations on the processes of borrowing and influence across these plays, and where satirical intent is to be inferred.[27]

Other critics take the view that Marston's play is simply a particularly audacious and ambitious example of the genre, embracing all of its tropes including its self-satire. While Antonio is clearly satirized, it is worth noting that the character himself is not presented as a satirist in the mould of Malevole, Vindice, or even Hamlet. In contrast to Hamlet's 'antic disposition', Antonio's disguise as Maria's fool is ridiculous and bleakly comic. His father's ghost urges him to 'assume disguise, and dog the court / In feignèd habit' in order to achieve revenge (III.iii.84–85). Significantly, and in

[24] Rebecca Yearling, *Ben Jonson, John Marston and Early Modern Drama: Satire and the Audience* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016) pp.86, 90.
[25] Ibid pp.94, 98.
[26] Barbara J. Baines, '*Antonio's Revenge*: Marston's Play on Revenge Plays', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, Vol. 23 No. 2, Spring 1983, 277–294, pp.279, 280.
[27] The parallels with *Hamlet* are set out by Fredson Thayer Bowers, in *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy 1587–1642* (Peter Smith, 1959) pp.118–119, and Harold Jenkins in *Hamlet*, Arden edition (Methuen, 1982) pp.7–13.

anticipation of Marston's later tragicomedy, Alberto advises Antonio to disguise himself as a malcontent rather than a fool: a suitable persona, Alberto says, would be some impoverished courtier who has become 'a spitting critic' (IV.i.4). Antonio refuses this satiric role and instead cites Machiavelli in his argument that to play the fool is a more cunning ploy. However, it is notable that he conspicuously fails to display any cunning in this role.

The disguise as a fool is condemned as a source of 'disgrace' by both Alberto and Maria (IV.i.10, 29), but Antonio favours it as an escape from his own excessive sensibilities, since a fool is 'not capable of passion' and, as a fool, he 'should want sense to feel / The stings of anguish shoot through every vein' (39, 51–52). This disguise, therefore, will enable him to attain the greatest possible distance from his own persona and experience. In character as the fool, Antonio blows bubbles and indulges in baby talk while Mellida is first on trial for her life, then told falsely that he has drowned himself; rather than making use of the privilege of free speech that such a disguise may afford him, Antonio merely uses it as a protective device that allows him to observe the machinations of his enemy. Affecting child-like behaviour of this kind could be interpreted as an effective, and even engaging, expression of the grief of a child for a murdered father. His passivity in the face of Mellida's calamities also faithfully reflects his relative helplessness. But his performance also emphasizes the restrictiveness of disguise and the fact that, as a tactic, it can decline into self-indulgence, which – rather than being an escape from Antonio's personality – is once again characteristic of his dramatic excess.

In contrast to Antonio's playing of the fool, Balurdo is naturally foolish, and lacks the necessary imagination for role-play; it is he who unwittingly burlesques the revenge plot, especially the notion of the vengeful ghost, as noted above. Balurdo's mere presence also comically deflates the blood-lust of the villainous Piero, since he is oblivious to it. There is a double level of parody here: Piero's commandeering of the language of revenge is a usurpation of Antonio's attempts to fulfil this role and take vengeance upon Piero himself, while Balurdo's foolishness deflates Piero's rhetoric. After the dumb-show representing Andrugio's funeral, Piero speaks a soliloquy expressing continued hatred towards his 'loathed foe' and praising 'snaky vengeance' (II.i.2, 8). He then summons Balurdo, who appears with his beard in disarray. As is often pointed out, this is a metadramatic reference to a famous moment in *The*

Spanish Tragedy: when Hieronimo is preparing the fatal performance of 'Soliman and Perseda', Balthazar appears similarly half-bearded (IV.iii.16). As John Kerrigan puts it, 'The mimetic impulse of revenge tragedy is wittily troped by this foregrounding of the artifice of the main, as against an inset, action'.[28] When Balurdo explains that 'the tiring-man hath not glued on my beard half fast enough' (II.i.30), he appears to have no identity other than that of the boy actor playing him, and seemingly failing to inhabit an adult, responsible role. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, Balthazar was realistically preparing to play a dramatic character and did not realize his own life was at stake, whereas Balurdo's grip on reality (and adulthood) is so tenuous that in his case no difference exists between a theatrical role and his own identity. Marston's blurring of the lines between adult, child, actor, fool, revenger and dramatic hero problematizes the task of locating integrity in the play.

Marston's satiric approach may represent an extreme, but any character engaged in role-play calls into question an audience's judgements about integrity. The dramatic malcontent is in a position to dominate audience interpretation of such conundrums because of the richness of his privileged communication across the playhouse. Within the play-world, while revenge plots are necessarily secret, the malcontent is granted the licence to express his views in a more or less public way; both his pursuit of vengeance and his satirical judgements are shared with the audience. The malcontent is a satiric persona, a dramatic device, and it is the intense relationship that he establishes with the audience that generates individuality and meaning. As he plots revenge, spectators understand him to be engaging with morally complex matters, even if they are swept along by a display of insouciant energy, as in the case of Vindice.

As his name indicates, Vindice personifies the passionate desire for vengeance, a desire that is not slaked by his murder of the Duke in Act III. While punishing the Duke – identified as the direct cause of his malcontented state – Vindice accumulates further motives for revenge; malcontentedness and vengefulness feed off one another. With his habit of direct address to the audience, typical of both the malcontent and the revenger, Vindice insists both that the retribution he deals in should fit the crimes he longs to expose, and that this be acknowledged in what amounts to a public ritual: he

[28] John Kerrigan, *Revenge Tragedy: Aeschylus to Armageddon* (Oxford University Press, 1996) p.207.

aims to achieve 'the sweetest occasion, the fittest hour' for revenge (V.i.16). The destruction wrought by the malcontent avenger becomes the destruction of a corrupt order, but because of his violent methods and satirical mode, he cannot play a part in the building of a new order.

As this chapter has shown, role-play, disguise, ritual and satire are the metatheatrical elements that at once express the complexity of the malcontent psyche, and render it accessible and engaging to an audience. Spectators' experience in the theatre is of the unfolding of truths that lie behind the workings of these dramatic techniques: an authentic face is revealed under a mask or a ritualized posture, and genuine indictments are shown to underpin vituperative satire. The malcontent relies on the power of all these outrageous and contradictory tactics – appearing to complicate, obscure and falsify where he is most pursuing revelation and truth – in his struggle to assert himself in the face of iniquity and injustice.

The intrigues and outbursts of a revenging malcontent such as Vindice are, however, not only strikingly potent but also frequently absurd; audience response to the satire of his words and deeds includes laughter, even in a tragic setting. The concluding chapters of this study turn to comedy, to consider the ways in which early modern playwrights deployed the theatrical power and cogency of the malcontent figure in comic contexts, and to examine the malcontent's productive relationship with the clown.

Part 4 The malcontent in comedy and tragicomedy

Chapter 7 'Sweet and bitter fools': The clown and the malcontent

This chapter examines the staging of and audience response to the malcontent in a comic context, with particular reference to *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*, and in the tragicomic context of *The Malcontent*.

Not only can the affectations of the malcontent's pose give rise to comic effects, but the dramatic structure of comedy often has a place for genuine melancholia as a counterpoint to the trajectory of the plot. In developing this counterpoint, a comedy can establish an unexpected affinity between its malcontent and its clown or fool, a connection most clearly seen in their shared privilege of free speech (which becomes a vehicle for satire) and their tendency to foreground metatheatrical effects through their habits of self-dramatization and direct address to the audience. Both characters are transgressive in the play-world, but both are also commentators who draw attention to the vices of others. While the clown tends to address his appeal to a sympathetic community, the solitude often associated with the malcontent is more conducive to scepticism, so that when the two characters encounter one another, they bring into question the nature of dramatic engagement and detachment, of commentary and satire.

Both malcontent and clown inherit characteristics from the Vice of medieval theatre: the clown emphasizes his crowd-pleasing buffoonery, and the malcontent his disruptive roguery, while his irreverent – even iconoclastic – wit belongs to both. The metatheatricality of the Vice, and his close relationship with his audience, are also prominent in both clown and malcontent. The chapter ends by considering the particular place of this type of metatheatre in comedy and tragicomedy, and the evidence that metatheatricality was accorded a special emphasis in works presented to the Globe audience.

Dramatizing discontent

Those who suffered, or affected to suffer, from melancholy – as discussed in Chapter 3 – had by the dawn of the seventeenth century become both a popular target for lampoons in prose or verse satires and a recognized trope in comic or satirical drama. For early modern theatre audiences, amusement or scorn were likely responses when

the dramatic malcontent appeared on stage displaying the familiar motifs of melancholy and rehearsing complaints that had become stereotypical.

The melancholic humour and the attitudinizing of those who would affect it were the subject of parody in comic drama as early as Ben Jonson's *Every Man In His Humour* (1598, revived by the King's Men in 1605). Although, as discussed in Chapter 3, the traditional physiological theories of the four humours were, as Matthew Steggle puts it, 'intimately bound up with early modern ideas of selfhood, not merely as a metaphor, but as a literal understanding of the processes at work',[1] for Jonson they also provided a metaphorical framework[2] upon which the dominant character traits and compulsions of his comic characters could be mapped. Moreover, the deliberate affectation of such traits could be exposed as 'more than most ridiculous'.[3] In *Every Man In His Humour*, Cash defines a humour as 'a gentleman-like monster, bred, in the special gallantry of our time, by affectation; and fed by folly'.[4] In the masque *Hymenaei* (1606), Jonson depicts the four Humours and the four Affections being driven out by Reason, thus giving formal and explicit staging to the conviction that unbalanced or compulsive behaviour can and must be countered by rationality.

In *Every Man In*, Stephen (the country fool) and Matthew (his city counterpart) compare notes about their aspirations to acquire the fashionable melancholic air, which Matthew calls 'your only fine humour' (III.i.80). In Jonson's 1599 sequel *Every Man Out of His Humour* (which was among the first plays performed at the new Globe, and is considered more fully below), even Puntarvolo's dog has its humour;[5] Sogliardo defends the creature with the remark 'you do not know the

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[1] Matthew Steggle, 'The Humours in Humour: Shakespeare and Early Modern Psychology' in Heather Hirschfeld, ed., *Oxford Handbook of Shakespearean Comedy* (Oxford University Press, 2018), p.220.

[2] See *Hymenaei*, Note to line 100, 'what we metaphorically call *humors*': Stephen Orgel, ed., *Ben Jonson: The Complete Masques* (Yale University Press, 1969); and *Every Man Out of His Humour*, Induction 100–102, 'It may by metaphor apply itself / Unto the general disposition'; all quotations from Helen Ostovich, ed., *Every Man Out of His Humour* (Manchester University Press, 2008).

[3] *Every Man Out of His Humour*, Induction 112.

[4] *Every Man In His Humour* III.ii.164–165; all quotations from Robert N. Watson, ed., *Every Man In His Humour*, New Mermaids edition (A&C Black, 1998).

[5] Dogs were considered to be susceptible to, or at least symbolic of, melancholy: in Jonson's *Epicoene* II.iv.123–124, Daw is advised to be as melancholic 'As a dog': Edward Partridge, ed., *Epicoene* (Yale University Press, 1971); Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* claims that 'dogges are most subject to this disease […] I could relate many stories of dogges that have died for griefe': *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 'Democritus Junior to the Reader' (Henry Cripps, 1621) p.44.

humour of the dog as we do' (III.i.491–492), and this humour presumably corresponds to its 'melancholy' appearance, noted by Carlo (II.i.233–234). The dog's sudden death, in turn, causes much sympathetic melancholy among its admirers.

The pose of the melancholic could be mocked by emphasizing not only its inauthenticity but also its irrationality, and both aspects were underlined by an incongruously comic setting. In *As You Like It* (1599), the melancholy Jaques cuts a striking figure in the exiled court in Arden, and he is quizzed by Rosalind as to the sources of his discontent. Having dismissed the types of melancholy that belong to the scholar, musician, courtier, soldier, lawyer, lady and lover – each of which he links to a particular human failing – Jaques claims to be the possessor of a melancholy 'of mine own, compounded of many simples'. The assertion of singularity is, ironically, a familiar one in the malcontent. Jaques's alleged distinctiveness is undermined, however, by his next claim that his discontent results from 'the sundry computation of my travels'. Rosalind (and the audience) can immediately assign him to perhaps the most commonplace category among melancholics: 'A traveller!'.[6] Rosalind then sketches an anatomy of this type, listing all the clichéd characteristics that Jaques should display, otherwise 'I will scarce think you have swam in a gondola' (IV.i.34). But the audience may note that Jaques is not guilty of the particular affectations Rosalind mocks; he does not 'lisp and wear strange suits; disable all the benefits of [his] own country' (30–32), and so on.[7] Therefore, despite all Rosalind's wit (which is in fact a mischievous display to impress the listening Orlando, rather than the result of thoughtful analysis), her easy dismissal of Jaques does not ring true. He is a more complex figure, to whom she is unwilling or unable to pay attention when Orlando is at hand.

In this exchange Jaques attributes any discontent other than his own to moral faults in the sufferer (rather than to natural causes or individual circumstances). But the melancholic strain in *As You Like It*, which is developed through the themes of banishment and injustice, is clearly related to the vulnerabilities of the human condition, 'the penalty of Adam' (II.i.5). Ever-present hazards for the inhabitants of Arden include cold, hunger, lack of shelter, the pain of exile, and a seemingly random

[6] *As You Like It* IV.i.15–19; all quotations from Juliet Dusinberre, ed., *As You Like It*, Arden edition (Bloomsbury, 2006).
[7] Rather than 'wear strange suits', as an admirer of professional fools he is 'ambitious for a motley coat', II.vii.43.

susceptibility to falling helplessly in love. Before Jaques's first appearance, we learn that he extends his sympathy to the animals who are prey to the hunter, as recounted by the First Lord in II.i. Such melancholic feelings as these are not proved to be affected, but neither are they indulged by the play.

Comedy has a special place for genuine melancholia as an undertone or counterpoint. A melancholy aspect or character (whether or not attracting audience sympathy) gives depth to the festivity of the main plot, not least by complicating and contextualizing its dénouement. In some comedies this melancholia is transitory, conveyed in the eloquent complaints of a character who is suffering a temporary misfortune, one that the comic plot will eventually alleviate. However, in Shakespearean comedy in particular, it is more commonly present as a strand woven through the entire drama. It is notable in the tone of fatalistic melancholy, linked to madness, that is so resonant in *Twelfth Night* (1601).[8] As will be discussed in the next chapter, *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It* also demonstrate that a melancholic motif can be sustained in comedy by the presence of a malcontent figure who is excluded from the comic dénouement.

At the beginning of *Twelfth Night* both Orsino and Olivia affect melancholy, respectively over unrequited love and the death of a brother, but theirs is from the start a conventional sadness characterized by self-indulgent excess, and is ripe for exposure – together with comic exploitation – by the other characters. The melancholy of Viola creates more genuine pathos in the play; she fears that she has lost a beloved brother, like Olivia, and suffers an unrequited love that mirrors Orsino's, but the pathos is created by her courage and resourcefulness, her self-effacement and reserves of patience: 'O time, thou must untangle this, not I. / It is too hard a knot for me t'untie'.[9] Since she relinquishes agency and places her trust in an unknown future, Viola's melancholia differs radically from the malcontent's ethos. A malcontent may act or speak in a despairing or irrational way, but lays claim to a measure of control over his own destiny; this type of power appears unavailable to female characters, even in the lower-stakes context of comedy.

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[8] This tone in the comedy, and its association with the tone of *Hamlet*, is frequently noted by critics; for example, Jean E. Howard writes that *Twelfth Night* 'is informed by a strain of melancholy that links it to *Hamlet*, the [Shakespeare] play probably closest to it in time of composition': *Shakespeare's Art of Orchestration* (University of Illinois, 1984) p.175.

[9] *Twelfth Night* II.ii.40–41; all quotations from Keir Elam, ed., *Twelfth Night*, Arden edition (Bloomsbury, 2008).

Comic drama can be presented as a kind of antidote or therapy for melancholy. In the early-1590s *Taming of the Shrew*, Christopher Sly – ignorant of what a 'comedy' might be – is advised in the Induction: 'melancholy is the nurse of frenzy – / Therefore they [your doctors] thought it good you hear a play / And frame your mind to mirth and merriment'.[10] This aims to put into practice the theory later expounded in Thomas Heywood's *Apology for Actors* (1612) that comedy is useful 'to recreate such as of themselues are wholly deuoted to Melancholly, which corrupts the bloud'.[11] Where these claims for therapeutic effect are in question there can be, as the *Shrew* Induction indicates, a metadramatic blurring of the distinction between audience and characters. But one of the characteristics of the true malcontent is that melancholia is too fundamental to his being for him to be assimilable to the comic world – a topic to be discussed in the next chapter.

The tragicomic genre is theoretically more hospitable to such encounters between the melancholic and the comic vision. Marston's *The Malcontent* was entered in the Stationers' Register in 1604 as a tragicomedy; it is evidently an experimental form, perhaps inspired by Italian works,[12] and blends social satire with a comic variation on the highly popular genre of revenge tragedy. The familiar tropes of this type of tragedy provide a framework against which unexpected comic effects are achieved, so that audience expectations and responses cannot rely on assumptions arising from one dramatic genre. *The Malcontent* has been labelled 'revenge comedy' by several critics, following R.W. Ingram, who considered that 'such a paradoxical description suits its peculiar and powerful attractions'.[13] More recent critics have built on Brownell Salomon's suggestion that Marston achieves 'a certain creative discontinuity […] between form and content' and an 'unexpected ludic collusiveness with the audience'. They have also taken the hint that 'One could expect modern readers to be more

[10] *The Taming of the Shrew*, Induction Scene 2, 129–131; quotation from Barbara Hodgdon, ed., *The Taming of the Shrew*, Arden edition (Bloomsbury, 2010).
[11] Thomas Heywood, *An Apology for Actors* (Nicholas Okes, 1612) Book 3, 'Of actors, and the true use of their quality', sig. F4r.
[12] This is noted by, among others, W. David Kay in *John Marston: The Malcontent*, New Mermaids edition (A&C Black, 1998) p.xvii; all quotations from *The Malcontent* are from this edition.
[13] R.W. Ingram, *John Marston* (Twayne, 1978) p.99. Genre-bending is frequently associated with Marston; Philip J. Finkelpearl had already labelled Marston's *Antonio & Mellida* a 'Senecan comedy' in *John Marston of the Middle Temple* (Oxford University Press, 1969) p.149. Rick Bowers describes *Antonio's Revenge* as a 'revenge musical' in T.F. Wharton, ed., *The Drama of John Marston: Critical Re-Visions* (Cambridge University Press, 2000) p.24.

receptive to this brand of serio-comic moral fable, in view of Samuel Beckett's like-minded method in *Waiting for Godot*'.[14] T.F. Wharton emphasizes the timeliness of his critical re-evaluation of Marston by pointing out that 'the discourse of criticism is now highly attuned to play and inter-play between text and audiences'; he describes Marston's 'essence' as 'exactly the voice of post-modernism'.[15] Sayre N. Greenfield, by contrast, remains within the tradition that regards Marston as a parodist, speculating that allusions to *Hamlet* (an instance of which is discussed below) indicate that the satirist and playwright is deliberately offering 'a parody of revenge tragedy, a form at which *The Malcontent* seems to aim but which it ultimately avoids'.[16]

The 'revenge comedy' label is useful, however, in capturing the way in which, at least in a retrospective view of *The Malcontent*, the eponymous revenger's excesses are tempered by the fact of his hidden identity as the ultimately forgiving Altofronto. As the play progresses, the existence of this alter ego both complicates and provides a potential safety valve for the dramatic tensions that point towards the tragic, particularly those conjured up in Malevole's own tortured vision. The term 'revenge comedy' also suggests the metadramatic self-consciousness that is such an important characteristic of Marston's play, rooted in the depiction of both Malevole – a humours character within a character, created and performed by Altofronto – and Mendoza.

Malevole's double nature is signalled before his entrance by Pietro's remark that 'The elements struggle within him; his own soul is at variance within herself' (I.ii.24–25). It is Mendoza who seems to represent the straightforwardly Machiavellian (and Senecan) would-be revenger of the piece, but interestingly he begins the play as the opposite of a malcontent: he is full of self-congratulation over his public position as a favourite at court, and his private status as the duchess's lover. The form and phrasing of his first soliloquy offer a fascinating compound of Malvolio-like fantasies[17] – 'Oh fortune! […] To be a favourite, a minion! To have a general timorous respect observe a man, […] a confused hum and busy murmur of obsequious suitors training him'

[14] Brownell Salomon, 'The "Doubleness" of *The Malcontent* and Fairy-tale Form', *Connotations* Vol. 1.2, 1991, 150–163, p.153.
[15] Wharton, ed., *The Drama of John Marston: Critical Re-Visions*, pp.4–5, 10.
[16] Sayre N. Greenfield, 'Quoting *Hamlet* in the Early Seventeenth Century', *Modern Philology*, Vol. 105 No. 3, February 2008, 510–534, p.521.
[17] ''Tis but fortune, all is fortune […] To be count Malvolio' and so on, *Twelfth Night* II.v.21ff.

(I.v.21–26) – and a parody of Hamlet's questioning analyses of human nature.[18] Mendoza's conclusion amounts to a rebuttal of the philosophical tenor of Hamlet's speculations, as he indulges in epicurean praise of women: 'In body how delicate, in soul how witty, in discourse how pregnant, in life how wary, in favours how judicious, in day how sociable, and in night how – oh pleasure unutterable!' (I.v.44–47). Rejected by the duchess in the following scene, Mendoza suffers a sudden setback which would appear to put his role on a tragic trajectory, but in the dramatic context created by Malevole's disguise it proves instead to be a comic reversal. Mendoza's subsequent soliloquy once again traduces Hamlet's vision, but this time to precisely the reverse effect: women are now seen as 'without all premeditation or prevention, rash in asking, desperate in working, impatient in suffering, extreme in desiring, slaves unto appetite, mistresses in dissembling, only constant in unconstancy, only perfect in counterfeiting' (I.vi.86–90).

After Mendoza's rejection by the duchess, Marston's tragicomedy stages two malcontent revengers, both initially targeting the same victims, and both confiding in the audience in self-dramatizing soliloquy. Mendoza's awareness is limited, however, as he believes himself to be a uniquely consummate actor and the victims he is manipulating to be naïve and incapable of pretence: 'I see God made honest fools / To maintain crafty knaves' (II.v.99–100). He is also comically unaware that all his victims survive his murderous plots – that the killings he orchestrates are manifested only in play-acting. Malevole, by contrast, is fully aware of the role-playing of others and the deceptiveness of appearances, staying one step ahead by virtue of his impenetrable disguise. The latter device is a staple of comedy, as are the elaborate contrivances by which he manipulates events and thwarts Mendoza's schemes while simultaneously appearing to fulfil them. As a commentator, Malevole is also comic rather than tragic in that he actively asserts control over his own fate and that of the state, harnessing his disgust at corruption by steering events towards a more desirable condition without bloodshed, rather than denouncing the body politic and excoriating other characters' flaws while indulging in the violence of the classic revenger.

Critics point out that *The Malcontent* also belongs to the genre of the disguised-ruler play, since Altofronto adopts a persona in order to reclaim his ducal power. A

[18] Beginning 'What piece of work is a man', *Hamlet* II.ii.269–276; all quotations from Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, eds, *Hamlet* Second Quarto, Arden edition (Bloomsbury, 2016).

disguised ruler triumphs over his enemies by establishing a vantage point from which to observe them closely while escaping observation himself. The popularity of this unsettling trope on the early modern stage may be accounted for by political preoccupations over the uncertain transfer of power from one reign to the next – power that nevertheless appears both absolute and omniscient. Under both Elizabeth and James, the necessity for state secrets and the mystery of royal power were asserted alongside, and in contradiction to, the metaphor of the monarch as an actor exposed to public display.[19] This paradox is reassuringly resolved in the staging of a benign ruler who gains a sympathetic audience for a necessary stratagem of disguise. However, in Marston's play it is the demeanour and conduct of the eponymous malcontent that dominates, rather than the politics of sovereignty. Kevin Quarmby hints at a thematic link between the malcontent persona and plot points relating to usurpation and the necessity for disguise in his remark that '*As You Like It*'s proto-tragicomic study of disguise, ducal usurpation and malcontentedness makes it a fitting precursor to Marston's *The Malcontent*.'[20] These elements are dispersed, however, in *As You Like It* (Rosalind is disguised, Duke Senior's power has been usurped, and Jaques is malcontented); in Arden, tragedy rarely threatens. In *The Malcontent*, the themes are powerfully concentrated in the dual figure of Malevole/Altofronto. His malcontentedness dominates, and tragedy seems close at hand.

It is Mendoza who represents the tragic vision of destruction in the play ('I'll be revenged', 'Perish all!', II.i.12, 27), while Malevole (in his identity as Altofronto) offers the comic vision of redemption. The revenge he seeks consists of 'The heart's disquiet' (I.iii.156), and he calls on 'vengeance' to come only from 'Heaven' (III.iii.123–127). Between these two malcontent revengers stands their mutual target Duke Pietro, who is also a would-be (and ineffectual) revenger against those responsible for his cuckolding (I.iii.105). Pietro's final repentance fits him squarely into Altofronto's stage-managed comic dénouement. The humiliated Mendoza, by contrast, is literally '*Kick*[*ed*] *out*' (V.vi.155) of the reconciliation scene, like a humours character expelled at the resolution of a comedy. The other humours

[19] As noted by Jonathan Goldberg in *James I and the Politics of Literature: Jonson, Shakespeare, Donne, and Their Contemporaries* (Johns Hopkins Press, 1983) pp. xii, 56.
[20] Kevin A. Quarmby, *The Disguised Ruler in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Ashgate, 2012) p.14.

character in the play, Malevole himself, also disappears in the instant that Altofronto doffs his disguise.

A special prerogative: 'As free as air'

Mendoza wishes for more power and verbal scope to castigate his antagonists – 'That I could rail now!' (I.vi.94) – but it is Malevole who is explicitly privileged with free speech in the play, and in this he points up an important link between the dramatic clown and the malcontent. Malevole's status at Duke Pietro's court is almost identical to that of an allowed fool.[21] When Pietro declares 'I give thy dogged sullenness free liberty; trot about and bespurtle whom thou pleasest' (I.ii.9–11), he is playing on the traditional association of melancholia and cynicism with dog-like attributes, but is also specifying Malevole's status as a useful, petted creature who is exempt from all the usual social and political restraints. He is not subject to the responsibilities associated with any particular social rank, a liberty he is granted in return for certain qualities and services ('he gives good intelligence to my spirit, makes me understand those weaknesses which others' flattery palliates', I.ii.26–28). When Pietro identifies the defining feature of a malcontent such as Malevole – 'he is as free as air; he blows over every man' (I.iii.2) – Marston is clearly echoing *As You Like It*, where the discontented Jaques is likewise given the privilege of freedom of speech and movement in a court disrupted by usurpation. Jaques uses the same simile to describe the privileges of the courtly fool, which he claims for himself: 'O that I were a fool! […] I must have liberty / Withal, as large a charter as the wind / To blow on whom I please, for so fools have' (II.vii.42–49). In *Twelfth Night*, the clown Feste seems to embody this freedom in the way he moves between the households of Olivia and Orsino, successfully plying his trade at both.

Malevole, on first revealing to the audience that he is in disguise, rejoices in the fact that this affords him 'that / Which kings do seldom hear or great men use – / Free speech' and 'a tongue / As fetterless as an emperor's' (I.iii.159–163). Since it is made clear in his following discussion with the faithful Celso that he is rightfully a mere duke, the claims that the malcontent disguise has given him the status of 'an emperor' are impressive. 'Play I well the free-breathed discontent?' he asks Celso proudly (I.iv.31). Taking on the role of Malevole enables Altofronto to give vent to genuine as

[21] 'There is no slander in an allowed fool though he do nothing but rail' (*Twelfth Night* I.v.89–90).

well as affected feelings of disgust, frustration and anger. The sense that these comments are appropriate to Altofronto's true situation ensures that the double identity of Malevole remains prominently in the minds of the audience.

An ability to comment without restraint gives the malcontent, like the licensed fool, a position apart from the society they are observing, and creates a special relationship with the theatre audience. As previously discussed, observer figures – through direct address or simply by physical positioning on the stage and by gesture – direct the gaze and the responses of the audience. Inasmuch as they make a claim to authenticity of judgement, these observers invite the audience to collaborate with them in imaginatively developing a point of view, whether of a comic or tragic nature, encompassing the dramatic action.

The clowns or fools on the early modern stage, descendants of medieval forerunners such as the Vice figure, were often metadramatic in nature. Like the Vice they communicated directly with the audience and commented on the actions of other characters, traditionally coupling fearless outspokenness with a creative use of language. It was noted above that in *Every Man In His Humour* Jonson paired a country clown with a city fool, as two complementary comic types; the courtly fool or jester is their professional counterpart. The court fool is a performer who self-consciously creates a humorous persona to please the powerful, and like the malcontent lives by his wits and his reputation for straight-talking.

The bitterness yet disconcerting honesty of a malcontent's tongue could provoke laughter in the theatre akin to that elicited by the clown, not only by the use of outrageous language but also by its incongruity in a hierarchical society. Moreover, the language of clowns and malcontents alike tends to reflect basic human experiences, as befits descendants of the Vice figure. Especially in the case of the clown or fool, this language is likely to favour earthy Anglo-Saxon rather than Latinate vocabulary. The clown's way with words could function as a parody of the more serious pronouncements of the malcontent, as in Touchstone's 'I shall ne'er be ware of mine own wit till I break my shins against it' (II.iv.54–55). Perhaps because of this skill in the playful use of homely language, there is a persistent sense that fools and clowns have access to certain kinds of knowledge or experience that are hidden

from the more sophisticated. Lear's Fool makes this explicit when he advises his master 'Thou shouldst not have been old till thou hadst been wise'.[22]

In a traditional hierarchical society, most people are required to stay within the bounds of the role into which they were born. The privileged few who, by birth or favour, are entitled to aristocratic roles must play them out in the overtly dramatized environment of a court. If they are to retain favour with the powerful, courtiers' options are severely constricted. Successful ones become like actors, speaking prescribed words and performing choreographed actions for public consumption, while maintaining the fiction that their behaviour is natural.[23] By refusing to do this, malcontents create a different role for themselves within the courtly environment, proclaiming their own authenticity and expressing scorn for what they regard as hypocrisy in others. In tragedy, malcontents most often conceal their real purposes in relation to the plot, and reveal themselves only in conversations with fellow plotters and in soliloquy to the audience. In a comic setting, however, they tend to speak openly, especially if they are indulged in the manner of Malevole and Jaques. Malevole condemns the court of Pietro to his face as being full of 'dreams, visions, fantasies, chimeras, imaginations, tricks, conceits!' (I.iii.53–54).

In the cases of both Malevole and Jaques, it might seem that the satirical manner in which they express their discontent is countered, or at least shown to be excessive, by the generosity of the ruler who indulges them. But the freedom of speech granted to clowns and comic malcontents signifies that both are vulnerable to the charge that they are mere performers. Their outrageous words and actions can be re-cast, whenever it is necessary to defend the status quo, as an amusing pose rather than a reflection of reality. Professional clowns are commodified by their role, and their licence to speak and behave unconventionally does not grant them independent agency. In a similar way, with Malevole and Jaques attempts are made to reframe their discordant notes and exhibit them as sophisticated court entertainment – symbolized from the outset by the '*out-of-tune music*' that announces Malevole at the beginning of *The Malcontent*, and the description of the music-loving Jaques as a man who is 'compact of jars' (II.vii.5). But in both plays the context of political usurpation

[22] *King Lear* I.v.41–42; all quotations from R.A. Foakes, ed., *King Lear*, Arden edition (Bloomsbury, 1997).
[23] Contemporary handbooks of courtly behaviour, of which the most famous is Baldassare Castiglione's *Il Libro del Cortegiano*, published in English in 1561, promoted such skills.

complicates moves by the powerful to assimilate dissent and the expression of discontent. Attempts to co-opt these as proof of the court's tolerance and wisdom are shown to be ineffectual; Malevole is a dispossessed ruler in disguise, seeking justice at the court of his usurper, whereas Jaques (who, far from being disguised, is a self-revelatory character in his insistence on his own individuality) points up the contradictory and tenuous nature of the exiled forest court of the usurped duke. Both the clown and the malcontent are in one sense circumscribed by their witty performing roles, but they ultimately serve to expose the emptiness and falsehood that often lie behind the performances of others. Harmless folly such as the exuberance of lovers is not exempt from this treatment; Touchstone parodies Orlando's verses in his absence, casually outperforming him, while Jaques's more earnest manner leads him later in the same scene to confront Orlando directly, attempting to counter romanticism with logical argument (III.ii.97–111, 252–284).

Such differences in approach between the clown and malcontent can establish the interface between comic and tragic modes. There is no licensed fool at Claudius's court in Elsinore, although there are courtiers such as Osric and Polonius who talk foolishly. Hamlet in effect usurps the role of court jester, the opposite of that of tragic revenger, by feigning madness. Lear's Fool knows the difference 'between a bitter fool and a sweet one' (I.iv.134–135), and it is undoubtedly the identity of a sharp and biting fool that Hamlet affects once the performance of 'The Murder of Gonzago' has exposed the rift between appearances and reality at Claudius's court. In some of *Hamlet*'s most famously metadramatic speeches, as discussed in Chapter 4, the prince gives his judgement on theatrical clowns, insisting that they curb their inclination to fully exploit their freedom of speech ('speak no more than is set down for them', III.ii.37) and stay within their prescribed roles. When Hamlet feels powerless to act, he appropriates the clown's freedom to speak, but finds that in this role he can only utter 'Words, words, words' rather than address the 'matter' that weighs so heavily with him (II.ii.189–190). Like many malcontents, Hamlet is (as Margreta de Grazia puts it) 'dispossessed – and, as far as the court is concerned, legitimately'.[24] In this condition, he shares the dubious status of the court clown.

The conventions of stage tragedy, exemplified so distinctly by the professional players at Elsinore, allow the tragic to come face to face with the comedy of the

[24] Margreta de Grazia, *Hamlet without Hamlet* (Cambridge University Press, 2007) p.1.

clown or fool. This encounter is staged to startling effect when Hamlet contemplates the skull of the jester Yorick in the graveyard scene. In Hamlet's repartee with the gravedigger (the wise 'clown' of the play) about death and the fate of human flesh, and in their shared reminiscences about Yorick's jests, the clowning mode is fully integrated into the tragic, to poignant effect. Hamlet's physical closeness to Yorick is striking, not only in the stage tableau of the prince holding the skull, but in the childhood memories he describes of riding on the jester's back, and kissing him. These recollections are juxtaposed with stark images of the once-loved man's body in a state of advanced decay.[25] It is clear that in Elsinore, the comic principle has been consigned to the past, and is now associated only with its own absence, death and degeneration. Hamlet's memories indicate that his father's court was of a kind that could not only freely accommodate but be enhanced by clowning skills such as those of Yorick, whose capacity for 'infinite jest' could be relied upon to produce a communal 'roar' of laughter around convivial 'tables' (V.i.175, 181).

This association of the clown, whose task is to entertain, with a community of spectators *within* the play-world contrasts with the malcontent's tendency to be secretive and to communicate only with certain individuals within that world. The clown's milieu is a public one, whereas the malcontent represents a hidden world of inner turmoil. The self-abandonment that is necessary to successful performance as a clown contrasts with the malcontent's insistence on his own dignity and singularity. With regard to the theatre audience, the comedy of the clown's direct address tends to bond spectators so that they respond as a collective social entity, whereas the malcontent typically makes an appeal to spectators' individual judgements and consciences. In *As You Like It*, Jaques points up these distinctions when he claims that he is 'ambitious for a motley coat' in order to express his dissent more freely. Given the liberty of a fool, he claims, he could achieve his aims through communal laughter because even those who 'are most galled with my folly' would aim to 'seem senseless of the bob'. The 'squandering glances of the fool' would generalize his message and act as cover for the pricking of individual consciences; his hearers would 'patiently receive my medicine' (II.vii.43–61).

[25] 'He hath bore me on his back a thousand times, and now how abhorred in my imagination it is. My gorge rises at it. Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft' (V.i.175–179).

In their different ways, therefore, both types of character are transgressive, breaking the boundaries of the play-world, and giving the audience access to wider frames of reference. The use of disguise makes these audience responses more complex. Altofronto, as the malcontent Malevole, and Hamlet in the persona of a madman resembling a court fool, both create disguises that enable them to adopt an observer role, and to await situations they can exploit in their pursuit of justice. The use of disguise in a revenge-tragedy plot was discussed in Chapter 6; the disguised would-be revenger gains power over other characters, casts social hierarchies out of kilter, and creates a close relationship with the audience through soliloquies. In comic situations, disguised tricksters such as Brainworm in *Every Man In* are laughed *with*, while they are misleading or laughing *at* others. Comic disguise is a sign of resourcefulness and creativity, and indicates a life-affirming extension of possibilities. The temporary disruption it causes generates humour, but it also has the potential to be enduringly transformative. The use of disguise by Malevole is clearly more troubling, and audience response to it is contingent upon the manner in which the egregious wrongs he witnesses will be righted. Early in the play, there is no way of knowing whether this will entail a comic or a tragic outcome. As R.W. Ingram points out,[26] when Malevole first steps forward to speak in his own persona as Altofronto he is like the Vice figure 'turned inside out': he reveals to the audience not the depths of his villainy (a development that might have been expected from the first scenes of the play), but the extent of his resolve to achieve justice.

Whether in comedy or tragedy, both the clown and the character in disguise are inescapably associated with the fact of being on stage, and of acting a part in the presence of an audience. Such a character is dramatic to himself, and can relish the performance he is creating. Shakespeare's gleeful, scheming Richard III, and Vindice in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, for example, display a similar self-awareness to that of a professional clown, enjoying a privileged perspective and relishing their own dramatic function. The performance aspect of these roles points up the gap between appearances and 'reality' in the theatre because they are not wholly contained within the framework of the plot. From their position slightly apart from the play's social structure, the discerning gaze of the clown and the malcontent takes in all alike and can have a levelling effect on the hierarchies they survey, offering different angles

[26] Ingram, *John Marston*, p.111.

from which to view the predicaments created by the plot. This creates a distancing effect for the audience which, in comedy, is necessary if these predicaments are to be viewed as funny, while in tragedy the tendency to universalize creates the resonances that carry significance beyond the fates of individuals depicted onstage.

As Salomon points out, the dramatic careers of both Malevole (reverting to the identity of Duke Altofronto) and Jaques culminate in 'that most palpably conventional device of formal closure for comedy, the judgment scene. With the same turn of phrase as […] Shakespeare's malcontented Jaques […] Altofront allots due punishments and rewards'.[27] The tragicomic plot of *The Malcontent* ends in reconciliations between married couples, creating a muted echo of the joyful weddings promised at the end of Shakespearean comedies. These new and renewed unions signify fruitful continuity and communal contentment, in contrast to individual discontent. Comedies end when damaging errors have been corrected and those who have perpetrated only harmless mistakes have been assimilated. Social hierarchies may remain fundamentally intact at the end of the play, but relationships are changed and valuable life-lessons are openly or tacitly acknowledged. However, the festivity associated with the dénouement of romantic comedy is not necessarily all-embracing. Jaques, for example, stands aloof from the marriages and reconciliations that end *As You Like It* and continues to pursue his own preoccupations (discussed in the next chapter), and what has been described above as the melancholic strand created by self-reflective clowns and malcontents ensures that the audience remains aware of other nuances. This in turn reminds them of their status as spectators, and prompts them to recall their knowledge of genre conventions. Naomi Conn Liebler points out that, in Shakespeare, 'tragedies perform social and communal concerns similar to' those of comedy, and both genres depend to a certain extent on ritual.[28] As Northrop Frye suggests, in comedy the balancing of participation and detachment, convivial sympathy and individual scepticism, creates effects that are analogous to the cathartic pity and terror classically claimed for the endings of tragedies.[29]

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[27] Salomon, 'The "Doubleness" of *The Malcontent* and Fairy-tale Form', p.154.
[28] Naomi Conn Liebler, *Shakespeare's Festive Tragedy: The Ritual Foundations of Genre* (Routledge, 1995) p.1.
[29] Northrop Frye, *A Natural Perspective: The Development of Shakespearean Comedy and Romance* (Columbia University Press, 1965) pp.102–104.

Encounters between clown and malcontent

Issues of engagement and detachment – within the play-world, and between performers and audience – are highlighted by the staging of direct or indirect encounters between the clown and the malcontent. A foregrounding of the fact that these characters share certain attitudes yet behave in contrasting modes tends to generate questions about the nature of the commentator or satirist's role. Moreover, rather than being mere observers they often act (jointly or separately) as catalysts to the action of the play. This mechanism can be seen in Shakespeare's pairing of Jaques and Touchstone, which offers a striking example of the special connection that a drama can develop between its melancholic and its clown. The latter is inherently a performer who maintains a degree of detachment from the play-world, while engaging the audience directly; the former can often function in an analogous way, while retaining his identity as an essentially mimetic dramatic character.

Touchstone, the first of Shakespeare's professional fools, has been 'wooed' by Celia (I.iii.130) to forsake her father's court along with the runaway cousins, and thus to enter the pastoral domain of Arden. Cast by circumstances beyond their control into this forest exile, both Jaques and Touchstone attempt to take up a detached and critical position. Touchstone, with his pseudo-learning and disdain for rural life, is even more of an outsider in Arden than Jaques. The latter's vivid report of their first encounter relates that he found Touchstone in the paradoxical position of basking in the sun while railing against 'Lady Fortune in good terms, / In good set terms' (II.vii.15–16) and philosophizing about the passage of time. Touchstone's studied and incongruous use of formal court language gives the melancholic Jaques such pleasure that he can 'laugh *sans* intermission / An hour by his dial' (32–33).

Jaques's delight at meeting a courtly 'fool i'th' forest' (II.vii.12), and also his boast about his own uncharacteristic merriment, are clearly prompted by his fascination with human contrarieties. As a malcontent at a ducal court established in a forest, Jaques himself embodies a contrary element within an incongruous community, and he evidently finds a pleasing echo of his own situation in the unexpectedness of Touchstone's presence in Arden. For his part, Touchstone claims that his unlikely location magnifies his status as clown: 'now am I in Arden, the more fool I' (II.iv.14). Arden does, in fact, extend Touchstone's scope for performance: he now has ample material to feed his exaggerated scorn at rural life, and can practise his wit on easy

targets such as Corin and William. This is as much a fulfilment of his nature and his professional role as are Jaques's melancholy tears for the hunted animals of Arden.

Jaques is fascinated by the 'knowledge ill-inhabited' (III.iii.8) that Touchstone represents, and his capacity for 'observation, the which he vents / In mangled forms' (II.vii.41–42). Touchstone's parodic language represents a kind of tribute to the subject of his parody, courtly learning, while Jaques's own mode is one of satire, tending to deny any value in its targets. The two characters therefore represent a meeting of two types of courtly wits: the improvising performer and the educated satirist. Juliet Dusinberre depicts their encounter as one where 'Shakespeare allows his [Jaques's] pose of false wisdom to be tried by the touchstone of true folly',[30] but Touchstone affects the role of educated satirist, too, when he is in contact with those he regards as his inferiors: the rustic Corin and (even more so) William, his rival for Audrey's love. His method of triumphing over Corin is to draw him into a debate about the virtues of the court (III.ii), while the less verbally proficient William is catechized and then banished from Audrey's company by means of threats (V.i). Jaques has notably less success than this when he takes on Rosalind and Orlando in separate verbal jousts (as will be explored in the next chapter).

The kinship between Jaques and Touchstone is founded in the relish both show for the absurdity of their presence in Arden, where each man ostentatiously refuses to submit to fantasies about rural idylls or a 'natural' communal life. They become vehicles for the gentle satire that *As You Like It* affords on a pastoral ideal that bears little relation to workaday life. Yet both are, by profession and inclination, so far removed from any recognizably workaday world themselves, and so dedicated to striking particular attitudes and performing prescribed roles, that their critiques of Arden paradoxically reinforce its claims to represent authentic, 'natural' ways of living.

The parallel between Touchstone and Jaques is developed throughout the play in their shared verbal dexterity as commentators and critics. Outsider status gives their pronouncements a metadramatic cast. When Jaques's (prose) conversation with Rosalind about melancholy is interrupted by Orlando's entrance with the line 'Good day and happiness, dear Rosalind', Jaques (irritated at being outwitted by Rosalind in the discussion) makes the riposte 'Nay then, God b'wi' you an you talk in blank verse'

[30] Dusinberre, ed., *As You Like It*, p.107.

(IV.i.27–29). This remark succinctly claims the mantle of plain speaker for himself, while pointing up for the theatre audience the complicated role-playing signified in Orlando's studied greeting to the 'pretty youth' known as Ganymede. By cutting through the pretences of the romantic plot (the details of which may be unknown to him, but whose shape and trajectory he is over-familiar with), Jaques forges another link to the audience, as a fellow observer of this comedy of love. His sceptical view of the Rosalind–Orlando romance may serve to point up its absurdities in an unsettling way, but the lovers' supreme indifference to him, and their refusal to take a share in his disenchantment, give ultimate reassurance that comedy rather than satire will triumph.

The unlikely alliance between Jaques and Touchstone culminates in the former taking the role of (highly satirical) mentor to the latter. Jaques offers advice about Touchstone's unorthodox marriage, and recommends him as 'a rare fellow' – for his professional entertainment value – to Duke Senior (V.iv.102). In *Twelfth Night*, by contrast, the melancholic Malvolio and the clown Feste are in open conflict, as it appears impossible for both to remain in favour with those who have power over their livelihoods. In the first act, Malvolio denounces Feste in front of their employer as a failed performer (I.v.79–85), setting up a mutual antagonism that binds the disparate pair from this scene until the final exchanges of the play.

Feste, with his 'mellifluous' singing voice (II.iii.52), is associated with music as well as jesting, and eventually – when he returns to his own persona after impersonating Sir Topas – he shows some pity for the falsely imprisoned Malvolio ('I will help you', IV.ii.114). If he is the 'sweet' kind of fool identified in *King Lear*, a benign performer in Olivia's household, Malvolio's foolishness is of the 'bitter' kind, forbidding others from creating music or other merrymaking (in his position as steward, controlling expenditure and maintaining decorum) and, at the last, seeking revenge on those who have exposed him to ridicule. Malvolio's contempt for Feste's role as jester in a noble household (a role that was 'already beginning to be an anachronism', notes Dusinberre),[31] contrasts with Jaques's delight in novel forms of this rich clowning tradition. It also prepares the way for Malvolio's readiness to step outside the well-established role of steward and take up a bold new part – 'thrust upon' him by Sir Toby and the other tricksters – as Olivia's wooer. This apparently startling

[31] Ibid p.99.

transformation is pursued willingly enough as it suits his fantasies and ambitions, but it entails adopting a costume and facial expression that are profoundly uncongenial to him: those of the foppish lover. The comedy in Malvolio's duping relies on the fact that his new pose is as disagreeable to himself as to everyone who sees it, and on his willingness to submit to the indignities of a role in which he can never achieve credibility. His inevitable failure as a performer, driven by his lack of self-awareness about what performance entails and how it intersects with identity, serves to point up Feste's skill and professionalism.

Malvolio may be a type of comic malcontent, always ready to express disapproval of Sir Toby and his ilk, but he is of the type to be laughed at rather than with, since his feelings of disgust preclude a sense of humour or of proportion, and he is far too self-absorbed to act as a commentator about what is at stake in *Twelfth Night*. This is a role that falls to Feste, who is alive to incongruities – particularly those connected with identity – that go unnoticed by other characters. This is personified in Viola, disguised as Cesario, to whom he remarks frankly: 'Who you are and what you would are out of my welkin' (III.i.55–56). Feste's apparent freedom to move between the households of Orsino and Olivia offers him an overview of the goings-on in Illyria, and his attitude towards them is one of bemusement, even wonder – an appropriate reaction for the audience of this play to share, culminating as it does in Olivia's exclamation 'Most wonderful!' (V.i.221). When Feste is thoroughly confused by an encounter with Cesario's double, Sebastian, he is driven to exclaim 'Nothing that is so is so' (IV.i.8). In the next scene he is to be found interrogating this rash formulation, created when he was mystified about Viola's true identity; speaking now in the persona of Sir Topas, and engaged in misleading Malvolio, he muses: 'That that is is […] for what is "that" but "that" and "is" but "is"?' (IV.ii.14–16). His intuition about Viola is expressly vindicated by her own remark, once again using the verb *to be* in riddling ways, to Olivia: 'I am not what I am' (III.i.139). Viola's disguise as Cesario is not quite impenetrable to Feste, but neither is it ripe for exposure by him. It is Malvolio whose failed pose as a lover is easily exposed to satire, and to the temporary imposition of the role of madman, but both of these false roles merely underline the robustness of his singular identity as comic malcontent. He is supremely resistant to the transformative power of dramatic comedy, even when unleashed by Feste in role as Sir Topas. Feste's outrageous, and outrageously successful, impersonation seems to

wreak an appropriate revenge on Malvolio for disdaining the performance skills that he himself completely lacks. In the song that ends his turn as Sir Topas, Feste claims that he is 'like to the old Vice […] with dagger of lath, in his rage and his wrath' (IV.ii.123–125). But Feste's 'whirligig of time' threatens to keep spinning out its revenges beyond the end of the play, with Malvolio determined to seek a vengeance of his own (V.i.370–371).

The performance of many kinds of roles is evidently a theme of *Twelfth Night*. But the overt role-play associated with the clown and the melancholic carries the suggestion that these characters are self-consciously dramatic, and therefore linked in some way to the creation of the drama as well as functionally implicated in the plot – they fashion the play, in a sense, as well as inhabiting it. Structurally, the action of *Twelfth Night* is initiated when Viola adopts the role of Cesario, since the Orsino–Olivia scenario has been shown to be in a sterile impasse; much of the plot of *As You Like It* is driven by Rosalind's performance disguised as Ganymede. Yet while Viola's and Rosalind's role-playing create metadramatic frames for certain aspects of the plot, particularly the love intrigues, these in turn are contained within frames created by the presence of the professional clown and the melancholic outsider. The latter frames are related to the traditions of comic drama, and contain the entire play.

The clown and the malcontent therefore often act, as remarked above, as catalysts in the working out of a play's plot and relationships. A romance setting can concentrate and clarify these comic elements. Towards the end of Shakespeare's career, in 1611, Autolycus – the itinerant pedlar in *The Winter's Tale* who is an important catalyst in the revelation of Perdita's true identity – first appeared on the Globe stage, seeming to consolidate the roles of clown and malcontent into one character. A performer to his fingertips, Autolycus enters the play singing, recalling Feste's musicality, yet in his first utterance claims to be an outcast from the court in words that could be spoken by many a dramatic malcontent: 'I have served Prince Florizel, and in my time wore three-pile, but now I am out of service'.[32] He seems to inhabit the boundary between fantasy and political and economic reality, and dissolves barriers between stage and auditorium, since playgoers would encounter ballad-sellers of his ilk inside or outside the playhouse.

[32] *The Winter's Tale* IV.iii.13–14; quotation from John Pitcher, ed., *The Winter's Tale*, Arden edition (Bloomsbury, 2010).

Although he combines some of the characteristics of malcontent and clown, Autolycus inhabits neither role fully, his dominant characteristic being an opportunistic dishonesty. Like Touchstone, Autolycus delights in the folly of rustic clowns, but the resentment fuelling his malcontent nature is revealed in his pleasure at stealing from them rather than merely outwitting them verbally. Just as Feste moves between Orsino's and Olivia's courts, Autolycus provides a link between the courts of Leontes and Polixenes, bringing Bohemian characters on board a ship bound for the Sicilian court (IV.iv). His role-playing, first as robbery victim (IV.iii) then as courtier (IV.iv), convinces only a deeply unsophisticated onstage audience, but at the sheep-shearing feast he is a great success as an entertainer. While the onstage audience is beguiled by his singing and his wit, the spectators in the theatre can observe, as well as those skills, the shrewd cynicism with which he exploits his victims while offering a commentary on their folly. Perhaps they will watch more carefully for pickpockets around them in the playhouse during those moments.

Like Jaques and Malvolio, Autolycus offers a tonal counterpoint to the protagonists in the romance plot; his venality is of a homely and materialistic kind that contrasts with the perversity of Leontes' sudden and tyrannical jealousy, and his ad hoc role-playing points up the instability of identity in the romance plot, which is reflected in the unconvincing way in which Hermione and Polixenes are forcibly cast as adulterers, and Perdita turned into an unlikely shepherdess. Amid the miraculous yet chastening reconciliations of the play's resolution, however, there is no place for the frivolous entertainments of a mere performer like Autolycus. In his other persona, too, as the malcontented out-of-service courtier, Autolycus remains as unassimilated at the end of his play as Jaques and Malvolio are in theirs. In romance, as in comedy, both malcontent and clown ultimately maintain their separation from the accommodations of the play-world.

Creating metatheatre for the Globe

Clown and malcontent characteristically demonstrate this type of detachment from onstage events in ways that intrigue and engage the audience. A frequently used technique for establishing meaningful connections to the audience was the highlighting of the theatrical occasion itself, drawing attention to the presence of spectators, as discussed in Part 1. The final part of this chapter examines evidence for a particular emphasis on the metatheatricality of clown and malcontent at the Globe.

Was this theatre a particularly fruitful venue for metatheatrical effects, and was its audience especially receptive to them? Jonson's *Every Man Out of His Humour*, which embraces metatheatricality with a zeal that would be difficult to surpass, is a work that offers support to such conjectures. It was first acted in 1599 in the newly opened Globe, and Helen Ostovich describes the evidence that the new theatre profoundly influenced Jonson's conception and staging of his play.[33] For example, the larger stage may have inspired the distinctive arrangement of multiple characters, arranged into various subgroups onstage at the same time; this is most notable in the lengthy Act III Scene I, set in a public space that would be familiar to most of Jonson's audience, 'the middle aisle in Paul's' (III.i.2–3). More pertinently, *Every Man Out* offered the audience at the new Globe a play that enthusiastically parodies stage conventions. Jonson created a celebratory theatrical event, rather than aiming at a convincing stage illusion peopled by 'realistic' characters attracting empathy. Plot is replaced by vignettes and thematic patterns. An outer frame is created not merely by an Induction setting up a stage performance,[34] but by a pair of commentators who are onstage throughout: the self-described *Grex*, Mitis and Cordatus, who act as an Aristophanic chorus for their host Asper's play, but comment directly on matters of casting and stagecraft as well as action.

The Globe audience would have been surprised by the seemingly premature beginning of the Induction, '*At the second sounding*' – that is, on the second of the traditional three musical warnings that a play is about to commence. Its liminal nature is therefore established before a word is spoken. Asper launches into a lengthy speech in verse about the corruption of 'this impious world', which might at first be taken as a formal prologue to the play were it not, contrary to theatrical convention, addressed to two other men onstage who constantly interrupt the speaker with advice about moderating his language. At line 49, Asper suddenly and absurdly refers to the Globe audience: 'I not observed this throngèd round till now' – confirming that we are dealing with a sophisticated and comedic take on the prologue convention, as well as an ironic vehicle for Jonson to express, in the persona of a rather testy dramatic

[33] Ostovich, ed., *Every Man Out of His Humour*, pp.41–42.
[34] This, the first of Jonson's inductions, is of the type that Thelma Greenfield defines as 'critical inductions', which 'present realistically situations of play production'; *The Induction in Elizabethan Drama* (Oregon University Press, 1969) p.xiv.

character, his own notoriously strident views about authorial autonomy. The stage direction makes explicit what Asper is doing: '*Here he makes address to the people*'.

It soon becomes evident that there is to be no clear dividing line between the Induction and the performance. After Asper's exit and the third '*sounding*', the actor charged with delivering a prologue for Asper's play takes the stage, but he shies away from his task, claiming to be 'unperfect' in the necessary speech (Induction 291). His function is taken over by a character from the play proper, Carlo, who enters while the dispute with the *Grex* over the delivery of the prologue is still unresolved. Addressing both the *Grex* and the Globe audience, he calls for an end to 'these grey-headed ceremonies' (Induction 314), preferring the simple drinking of healths. Carlo proceeds to discuss the personality of the author of the forthcoming play, a drama he names as *Every Man Out of His Humour*. Whether this author is Asper, or Jonson himself, or to what extent Asper is an alter ego of Jonson's, is left to the audience's judgement. Carlo's status is disorientatingly multi-faceted – he is both a character in the forthcoming play and 'an impudent common jester' whom 'the author calls' Carlo Buffone (Induction 350–351). This 'calling' by the author (whoever we take him to be) irresistibly suggests calling into being, as well as naming. The Induction also establishes a link between the clownish Carlo and the malcontent Macilente, by virtue of the prominence given here to Carlo and to Asper, who is to act Macilente.

Asper takes a leading role in his own drama, acting the part of the envious malcontent Macilente, but declines in his final speech (given directly to the Globe audience) to change out of the costume of Macilente in order to speak in the persona of Asper, as might be expected for a frame-closing epilogue; he explains that 'the shift would have been somewhat long' and asks instead for the audience to 'imagine it' done (V.iv.53–55). The level of 'reality' represented by Asper is simultaneously asserted yet overshadowed here by the creative work asked of the spectators, who are explicitly directed to accept the actor they see in front of them as embodying a role we might describe as 'Asper still dressed for his self-penned role as the malcontent Macilente'. Because he is supposedly author as well as actor, this adds an extra layer to the comic effect achieved by Shakespeare in the epilogue to *As You Like It*, spoken by a boy acting Rosalind-still-dressed-as-Ganymede ('If I were a woman'…). This type of double or triple vision makes it difficult for an audience to feel merely empathetic

engagement with the characters, and is clearly calling for a different response that involves contemplation of the issues raised.

The presence throughout *Every Man Out* of the commentating *Grex* explicitly breaks the stage illusion of Asper's play in a way that may have been comically familiar to those members of the Globe audience who were accustomed to the distracting behaviour of privileged stage-sitters in the indoor theatres. But in distancing Asper's play, another theatrical illusion is created: the new Globe – with its large stage from which stage-sitters were excluded – now represents a fictionalized version of a different and competing kind of theatre.

The satirical implications of the *Grex*'s opinionated interventions are mirrored by the commentating function of characters within the play proper, among them the fool Carlo and the malcontent Macilente. This is a play in which we are keenly aware of audiences as well as actors. Helen Ostovich identifies 'a nest of five frames' in Jonson's play, 'which he uses to indicate the relativity of human perspective and intelligence. Each of the successive frames reflects the diminished capacity of the characters included within it'.[35] As suggested by this analysis, the audience is likely to feel decreasing identification with characters in the inner frames.

The most interesting frame from the theoretical point of view – as opposed to the audience's experience in the theatre – is undoubtedly the outermost one consisting of Asper and the *Grex*. Asper is evidently a satirical self-portrait of Jonson himself, and Asper's own humour is one of righteous indignation and rigorous fault-finding. Asper in turn creates and acts out the character of Macilente, the malcontent who takes the follies of others as a personal affront. Jonson's satire is therefore refracted through two other lenses, an apparent multiplying of points of view which deflects potential criticism from the master playwright while reinforcing his design. When Macilente is jolted out of his discontented humour by a miraculous vision of the Queen in the masque-like ending, the effect is to momentarily dissolve all frames into a fantasy of social harmony and psychological coherence. The fact that Jonson had trouble ending the play satisfactorily is attested by the various amendments of the ending in quarto and folio versions, including one ending devised specifically for a court performance,

[35] Ostovich, ed., *Every Man Out of His Humour*, p.53.

which no doubt required different emphases from those appropriate to the Globe audience.

Further evidence about metadramatic features that were considered suitable for the Globe stage is provided by the transfer of *The Malcontent* from Blackfriars to the Globe in 1604. John Webster wrote additions for the play[36] that introduced not only a metadramatic induction, but a new character in the play proper, the fool Passarello. Scholars agree that this new part was written for Robert Armin, who had performed as Touchstone[37] and Feste (and would in due course enact Lear's Fool), and the role undoubtedly 'draws on the same repertory of comic devices'.[38] Passarello – called a 'bitter fowl' by his master Bilioso in a punning reference to his talk of woodcocks (III.i.136) – shares a scene with Malevole (I.viii) in which the special relationship between fool and malcontent, and their joint preoccupation with performance, are once more suggested. Passarello is greeted with pleasure by Malevole, and they discuss the former's role and costuming. Malevole seeks information on the secrets and moods of those at court, and Passarello's sharp, punning responses are a parodic echo of Malevole's own when he is questioned for 'news' by Pietro in I.iii. Both characters have the traditional clown's fascination with rhetorical tricks, and use language to shock the listener out of complacency. Both are sensitive to the theatricality of other characters' behaviour – Passarello tells Malevole that Bilioso is 'the leanest and pitifull'st actor in the whole pageant' (I.viii.53–54), a metadramatic reference given piquancy by the notoriously slender physique of the actor likely to have played Bilioso (and Sir Andrew Aguecheek) at the Globe, John Sinklo.[39]

Passarello characterizes himself as 'common in the court', and claims that 'all share me' (I.viii.59–61). This self-personification as pure Folly matches the way Malevole presents himself as the quintessential Malcontent. Malevole's monologue at the beginning of III.ii is a performance of the malcontent role for the benefit of

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[36] Analysis by G.K. Hunter and D.J. Lake separates Webster's 'Additions' from Marston's own 'Augmentations', as referenced on the 1604 third-quarto title page: G.K. Hunter, ed., *The Malcontent*, Revels edition (Methuen, 1975) pp. xlvi–liii; D.J. Lake, 'Webster's Additions to *The Malcontent:* Linguistic Evidence', *Notes and Queries*, Vol. XXVIII No.2, April 1981, pp.153–158.

[37] Some scholars argue that the role of Touchstone may have been written for and first performed by Will Kemp (Dusinberre, ed., *As You Like It*, p.4) before being taken by Armin.

[38] Kay, ed., *John Marston: The Malcontent*, p.xxxi.

[39] Charles Cathcart, 'John Marston, *The Malcontent*, and the King's Men', *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, Vol. 57 No. 228, February 2006, 43–63, p.59.

Passarello's master Bilioso, in which Malevole refers to his assumed persona in the third person: 'In night all creatures sleep; / Only the malcontent, that 'gainst his fate / Repines and quarrels, alas, he's good-man tell-clock!' (III.ii.10–12).

The metadrama inherent in Marston's original play includes the effects arising from Malevole's double role, as discussed above; from the fact that its title and main character refer to a theatrical type; and from its innovative use of a self-consciously experimental, blended genre. Several scholars have speculated about reasons why Marston and/or Webster adapted the play for the Globe in a way that further emphasizes its metatheatricality.[40] Simon Trussler accepts the frequently expressed view[41] that the children's company at Blackfriars was characterized by a 'presentational' acting style, tasked as the boys were with performing adult passions, and that a 'mutual awareness' between boy actors and audience would have been deliberately cultivated as an 'excellent stylistic framework for satire'.[42] For the Globe audience, Trussler concludes, the 'distancing effect' appropriate to satire was replicated by prefacing the play with an Induction portraying the actors as if in their own persons.[43] For Anthony Caputi, on the other hand, it is the comic aspects of this metadramatic foregrounding of actors that compensates for the comedy inherent at Blackfriars in 'the children's acting style'.[44]

What is certain is that the Induction presupposes the existence of a particularly intimate relationship between the Globe and its audiences.[45] The Induction relies on knowledge the spectators already possess about another playhouse and its practices,[46] about the actors who are to perform, and plays that had previously succeeded on the same stage, with the evident expectation that these references will be not only understood but enjoyed. The opening exchanges point up the differences between the

[40] The Induction has 'Burbage' himself explain that additions were needed 'only as your salad to your great feast, to entertain a little more time and to abridge the not-received custom of music in our theatre' (Induction 81–83).
[41] For example, R.A. Foakes, 'Tragedy at the Children's Theatres after 1600: A Challenge to the Adult Stage', in David Galloway, ed., *The Elizabethan Theatre* II (Macmillan, 1970) pp.40–41.
[42] Simon Trussler, ed., *John Marston: The Malcontent* (Methuen, 1987) p.ix.
[43] Ibid p.xxiv.
[44] Anthony Caputi, *John Marston, Satirist* (Cornell University Press, 1961) p.201.
[45] As Thelma Greenfield puts it, 'Webster here has given us the frankest, most particularized and most purely comic induction of all': *The Induction in Elizabethan Drama*, p.86.
[46] This includes knowledge of the tradition of inductions in the children's companies, although they 'had become rather rare on the public stage' (Greenfield, *The Induction in Elizabethan Drama*, p.87).

indoor Blackfriars, with its proud gallants sitting on the stage, and the open-air Globe, where 'the gentlemen will be angry if you sit here' (Induction 1). The flattering implication is that, for the more democratic Globe audience, the play's the thing, rather than self-display.

Richard Burbage – who had recently acted the part of Hamlet at the Globe – appears as himself in the Induction, with lines that champion 'the ancient freedom of poesy' (Induction 65). The other actors point to the fact that Burbage is to take the title role in the forthcoming performance – 'Doth he play the Malcontent?' (85) – ensuring that the link is secure in spectators' minds before the play proper begins. Charles Cathcart notes that it is Webster's amending hand which, here and elsewhere, has taken 'special care […] to accentuate *The Malcontent*'s relationship with *Hamlet*', and that in doing so he 'showed a sensitivity to the referential manner of the original *Malcontent*'.[47] But amid the Induction's discussion of *The Malcontent*'s quality, of the circumstances of its transferral from Blackfriars, and whether the Blackfriars version was better, there are joking references to motifs that link the forthcoming play to *As You Like It* as well as to the less tragic moments of *Hamlet*. As several of the play's editors note, the comic passage about the donning and doffing of a hat with a feather, which begins with Condell's 'I beseech you, sir, be covered' (33), recalls Hamlet's dialogue with Osric,[48] while also more overtly referencing Malevole's 'no fool but has his feather' in the play to come (V.iii.39). In a boast about the power of the play's language, Sly claims that this jest in the indoor playhouse has come close to ruining the local feather trade – 'Blackfriars hath almost spoiled Blackfriars for feathers' (Induction 41–42). The Globe, by implication, is comfortably distanced from such comic mishaps as have befallen its commercial rivals. The 'extempore' prologue, meanwhile (128–134), burlesques the epilogue spoken by Rosalind in *As You Like It*, with bawdy puns echoing the latter's more genteel division of the audience into male and female ('for the women's sakes […] for the men's sakes').

Webster may have introduced the Induction to *The Malcontent* for the Globe, but Marston's previous plays for the boys' companies had also been characterized by metadramatic inductions, just as he had previously experimented with mixed genres.[49]

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[47] Cathcart, 'John Marston, *The Malcontent*, and the King's Men', pp.56–57.
[48] *Hamlet* V.ii.79–91.
[49] Rebecca Yearling notes critics' longstanding disagreements on the genres and purposes of Marston's plays; she considers that 'Marston produces his own brand of didactic theatre' and

The first of his major plays, *Antonio & Mellida*, written for Paul's Boys in 1599–1600, can be described as a satirical romantic comedy, which develops a revenge-plot situation to a happy ending. It begins with an Induction in which the youth and energy of the boy actors is celebrated in their preparatory discussion, '*with parts in their hands*'.[50] They evaluate roles in terms of character types, with the player who is to act Felice using the word 'humour' (Induction 109) to describe them. The boy acting Antonio bemoans the need to play two roles in one, since Antonio is disguised as an Amazon: he is to be 'an hermaphrodite, two parts in one […] I shall ne'er do it' (65–69). But the one who is to enact Alberto relates uncomplainingly that 'The necessity of the play forceth me to act two parts: Andrugio, the distressed Duke of Genoa, and Alberto, a Venetian gentleman enamoured on the Lady Rosaline' (21–23). The traditional practice of doubling, as described in this latter case, is clearly less worthy of audience attention than the acting of a role in which a character takes on a new persona, and a gender-bending one at that. In emphasizing this point, Marston is preparing the audience for the contradictory effects of Antonio's first speech – a tragic exposition delivered in cross-dressed disguise – and for an important trope in the play as a whole. As Keith Sturgess writes, 'role-play itself is a major concern in Marston's art'.[51]

In this semi-comic play, Felice is a character pertinent to Marston's later work in that his name suggests he is the opposite of a malcontent. This Venetian gentleman's contentedness is characterized by his (claimed) lack of envy, about which he is highly self-conscious; this is evidently an exercise in stoical self-discipline. In a soliloquy at the beginning of III.ii, he tells us that he has 'walked all night / To see if the nocturnal court delights / Could force me envy their felicity' (III.ii.5–7). He tells Castilio that what he concludes from his observations is that 'I envy none, but hate or pity all' (III.ii.46), since even the best people combine faults with their virtues. He ends this scene by saying 'I hate not man, but man's lewd qualities' (III.ii.277), which perhaps aligns him with the malcontent despite his name. Felice has little impact on the main plot but his observations do frame the subplot, which involves flattery, vanity and foolish wooing. He is a disapproving presence, mocking and '*wondering at them all*'

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discusses his 'blending and problematising of genre conventions': *Ben Jonson, John Marston and Early Modern Drama: Satire and the Audience* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016) p.4.

[50] *Antonio & Mellida*, opening stage direction; all quotations from Keith Sturgess, ed., *John Marston: The Malcontent and Other Plays* (Oxford University Press, 1997).

[51] Ibid p.xv.

(II.i.49). But what is clear about Felice's humour is that it is contingent on his social relationships, rather than solipsistic. In Marston's satiric vision, Felice's efforts towards stoicism do not dissolve social bonds: in the same scene Felice declares love for Antonio and offers him aid. And, as Antonio's friend, Felice is one of those who are mourned and avenged in Marston's sequel, the tragedy *Antonio's Revenge*. That this sequel was conceived at an early stage is evident from the fact that the Induction of *Antonio & Mellida* mentions a forthcoming 'second part' for the play, 'if this obtain gracious acceptance' (130–131).

As for Marston's later play *The Malcontent*, its success, and perhaps the controversy of its transfer from Blackfriars to the Globe, are registered in a now little-known drama acted at Blackfriars within a few years, *The Fleer* by Edward Sharpham (1606).[52] This satiric comedy features another deposed duke disguising himself as a malcontent: he is Antifront, whose name is clearly related to, if not a direct parody of, Altofronto's. Disguised as Fleer, Antifront makes explicit the metadramatic intent of the play by invoking a simile that reverses the stage illusion: 'The city is like a comedy, both in parts and in apparel, and your gallants are the actors'.[53] Sharpham is not content with a single disguise for Antifront; exploiting stage conventions to the limit, the character is comically invincible in his performance of multiple identities. The apothecary Alunio instantly allows Antifront/Fleer, claiming to be a fellow professional, to take charge of his shop (IV.ii), and the justice's clerk Mittimus immediately entrusts him with Justice Ferrio's identifying ring and message (V.ii), enabling Antifront/Fleer to adopt the role of a judge. He is rather pointedly addressed as 'Jaques' in the first of these guises, when he has claimed his name is Giacomo (IV.ii.38–43). This is possibly an allusion to the comic malcontent in *As You Like It*, and Shakespeare is certainly parodied in the way the disguised-ruler motif culminates in a formal judgement scene, as in *Measure for Measure*, and in the depiction of a pair of sisters who impersonate boy servants in an effort to win over their gallants. At the end of the play, confusions of identity are cleared up in short order as Antifront pairs

[52] Lucy Munro considers that the play was 'Written as a response to or replacement for *The Fawn*', another of Marston's disguised-ruler plays (1604–1605), 'which was taken to Children of Paul's *c*. early 1606': *Children of the Queen's Revels: A Jacobean Theatre Repertory* (Cambridge University Press, 2005) p.173.
[53] *The Fleer* II.i.148–162; all quotations from Lucy Munro, ed., *The Fleer* (Nick Hern Books, 2006).

up five sets of marriage partners in a dozen lines, then appeals for the audience's approval in a mere two lines, dispensing with the need for an epilogue.

Comedy, even of this highly satirical kind, emphasizes renewal, the triumph of a community, and the assimilation of antithetical elements. The next chapter discusses the significances that Shakespeare finds in those comic malcontents who, not being rulers in disguise, are less easily assimilated to the comic vision.

This chapter has outlined the ways in which malcontent characters enrich major comic dramas, representing a popular dramatic type and expanding the horizons of the comic world. The malcontent, if he is at times a straightforward target for comedy because of his dubious claims to special status and his association with the excesses of humours theory, is more often a suggestive foil for the comic spirit, and wields considerable power in modulating audience response. A character such as Jaques represents a vital counterpoint to the comic tenor of Arden, while the blending of genres in *The Malcontent*, it has been shown, allows the drama to accommodate genuine discontent within an ultimately non-tragic vision.

Like the clown or fool, with whom he is so often associated, the malcontent's role involves a self-consciously performative aspect, as well as placing him in the liminal position of commentator. Metatheatrical effects arise spontaneously from the essential attributes of both clown and malcontent; evidence has shown that some playwrights specifically emphasized metatheatricality for the Globe audience, with the adaptation of *The Malcontent* offering a unique case study in the emphasis placed on self-conscious theatricality in drama created for the Globe stage.

Metadramatic effects are intensified by juxtapositions of malcontent and clown, whereby tragic elements can be poised against the comic. In their encounter onstage, clown and malcontent recall the classic symbols of drama, the laughing and grimacing masks of comedy and tragedy, and these two characters create resonances that are emblematic of the range of possibilities offered by the theatre. Since the clown tends to bond with the audience by engaging with it as a collective – sharing observations on life's absurdities – while the malcontent appeals to individual consciences and judgements, different modes of audience response are counterbalanced, along with different moods.

The nature of the audience's experience of Shakespearean comic malcontents, and the resultant interchange of ideas about the dramatic imagination, are the topics of the following chapter.

Chapter 8 Shakespearean malcontents and the comic resolution

The romance plots of *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*, as discussed in the previous chapter, find their counterpoints in the more challenging pronouncements of Shakespeare's great comic malcontents, Jaques and Malvolio. Their roles are considered more closely in this chapter. In the final scenes of these plays, Jaques and Malvolio explicitly dissociate themselves from the dénouements, and both characters close the drama with a gesture that raises questions of interpretation. The two malcontents remain unassimilated not because of a desire, like Don John's in *Much Ado About Nothing*, to frustrate the comic resolution, but because the plays' recognitions and reconciliations take place in affective domains that are alien to them. Malvolio, although he has harboured ambitions that are affronted by the marriage choices of Olivia, is indifferent to Orsino's defeat by Sebastian or the identity of Viola/Cesario. Jaques, likewise, intends to pursue his own preoccupations – he is more interested in the future of the repentant Duke Frederick than that of all the bridal couples of whom he formally (and satirically) takes leave at the end of the play. The dramatic effects created through these comic malcontents are the subject of this chapter.

The significance of Malvolio and Jaques as malcontents within a comic structure is pointed up when they are compared with Don John in the earlier play *Much Ado*. As Theodore Spencer notes in 'The Elizabethan Malcontent', Don John was one of the first dramatic malcontents to be sketched.[1] The taciturn Don is described by Hero as 'of a very melancholy disposition' – he is the diametrical opposite of the talkative Beatrice, who has 'little of the melancholy element in her'.[2] Don John is a non-comic malcontent doomed to failure from the start by the logic of comedy, which he is unable to subvert, despite aiming to be – in his hatred of his more nobly born brother, and his jealousy of Claudio – as destructive as Iago. When Shakespeare came to write the tragedy *Othello*, he depicted in Iago a man who similarly harbours animosity against both a rival, Cassio, and a (military) superior, Othello. But while Iago's deception brings about the spectacular destruction of a loving relationship, Don John

[1] Theodore Spencer, 'The Elizabethan Malcontent' in James G. McManaway, Giles E. Dawson and Edwin E. Willoughby, eds, *Joseph Quincy Adams: Memorial Studies* (Folger Shakespeare Library, 1948) p.533.
[2] *Much Ado About Nothing* II.i.5, 316–317; all quotations from Claire McEachern, ed., *Much Ado About Nothing*, Arden edition (Bloomsbury, 2016).

is thwarted by clown-like comic characters, and his machinations serve only to introduce the necessary plot complications into the courtship of Claudio and Hero. Don John's role as plot catalyst is similar to that of Autolycus in the late play *The Winter's Tale*, discussed in the previous chapter. Don John is, as he declares in his first utterance, 'not of many words' (I.i.150), but is a 'plain-dealing villain' (I.iii.29–30). He is not one given to putting on a performance as a Machiavellian schemer like the verbally dexterous Iago. His lack of words, and even of direct action – the plot against Hero being hatched and conducted by his followers – distances him from the audience and moderates dramatic responses, in contrast to the fascination of Iago's intrigues on the one hand and the involving satirical effects created by the words and actions of a Jaques or Malvolio on the other.

The title of *As You Like It*, and the alternative title of *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*, both address the prospective audience directly through the second-person pronoun 'you', and both hint that audiences retain agency in deciding how they engage with drama. But these titles also boldly proclaim that the playwright has learned how to please his audiences, and is determined to furnish them with what they seek. Spectators paying to see a comedy have a right to expect amusement, and laughter is commonly aroused by that which touches an audience directly, especially through creating a pleasing incongruity in regard to its sense of 'normal', or accepted, behaviour. Comedy implies a 'happy ending' for sympathetic characters and the triumph of values commonly held to be positive, but the treatment of Malvolio tests the boundaries between the spectators' willingness to laugh and their sense of empathy, while the satirical role of Jaques flatteringly reflects the audience's knowingness about pastoral and romantic comedy. Within the play-world Jaques enjoys the status of a publicly acknowledged satiric commentator, just as Malvolio is esteemed by Olivia for his air of respectability and sobriety. But the plays also highlight limitations to the power that disapproving or satiric voices hold in regard to effecting real social change.

This chapter considers how Shakespeare creates in Jaques and Malvolio – both characters added to his plot sources – instruments of dramatic and metadramatic

perspective that generate the conditions whereby, as Keir Elam puts it, 'the spectator plays the part of co-protagonist' in the development of the comedy.[3]

Jaques: 'A kind of comic Hamlet'

Today it is often assumed that 'The part of Rosalind dominates the play',[4] but the role of Jaques has long been a focus of critical attention. William Hazlitt begins his consideration of the characters in *As You Like It* with Jaques, whom he describes as 'the only purely contemplative character in Shakespear. He thinks, and does nothing'.[5] The comparison with Hamlet that is implicit in Hazlitt's remark was taken up by many later critics.[6] But in the case of Jaques, critics did not tend to indulge in the self-identification that was common in nineteenth-century writers offering their interpretations of Hamlet.[7]

Jaques has often been considered in terms of the classic Elizabethan melancholic, and is usually described as adopting a pose, perhaps as a result of being a reformed libertine as alleged by Duke Senior (II.vii.65). This pose is frequently judged by critics to be unattractive and constricting – 'His posturing is so iron-clad that it not only defines but confines him'[8] – as well as antipathetic to the romantic plot. Scholars have labelled him as either a satirist or a melancholic, or a combination of the two. Michael Mangan, noting the importance of the satire genre in the 1590s, takes Jaques to be a version of the court fool, but also a strikingly contemporary figure in that 'he is the epitome of the Elizabethan satirist'.[9] As a purveyor of satire, Jaques is often viewed as respectable but sadly out of place in Duke Senior's exiled court. Michael

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[3] Keir Elam, ed., *Twelfth Night*, Arden edition (Bloomsbury, 2008) p.7. All quotations from the play are from this edition.
[4] Juliet Dusinberre, ed., *As You Like It*, Arden edition (Bloomsbury, 2006) p.5. All quotations from the play are from this edition. Harold Bloom goes further: 'The play belongs to Rosalind': *Shakespeare and the Invention of the Human* (Fourth Estate, 1999) p.221.
[5] William Hazlitt, *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* in Duncan Wu, ed., *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt* Vol. 1 (Pickering & Chatto, 1998) p.247.
[6] Such as Elmer Edgar Stoll, who wrote that Hamlet 'is more like Jaques than any other character in Shakspere', in 'Shakspere, Marston, and the Malcontent Type', *Modern Philology*, Vol. 3 No. 3, January 1906, 281–303, p.289.
[7] Following Hazlitt, 'It is *we* who are Hamlet': *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*, p.143, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'I have a smack of Hamlet myself, if I may say so': Carl Woodring, ed., *Table Talk of the late Samuel Taylor Coleridge* Vol. II, *Collected Works* 14, (Routledge, 1990), June 24, 1827, p.61.
[8] Dale G. Priest, '*Oratio* and *Negotium*: Manipulative Modes in *As You Like It*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, Vol. 28 No. 2, Spring 1988, 273–286, p.274.
[9] Michael Mangan, *A Preface to Shakespeare's Comedies, 1594–1603* (Longman, 1996) p.211.

Hattaway writes: 'A Marston or a Jonson would have placed Jaques in the court of Duke Frederick rather than Duke Senior.'[10] Or, as Agnes Latham puts it, again invoking a comparison with Hamlet, 'It is only in Arden that his cynicism looks ridiculous. At Elsinore it would be a different matter'.[11]

Other critics have emphasized Jaques's melancholia, and once again its fashionable nature: 'Shakespeare's contemporaries would hardly have had difficulty in recognizing in Jaques a variant of the Elizabethan melancholy man', wrote Harold Jenkins.[12] Indeed, the play implies its own comment upon this readiness to diagnose melancholia, with the other characters labelling him as 'melancholy Jaques' at every opportunity.[13] More recent scholars have stressed that both the satirical and melancholic aspects of Jaques's role made for a vivid topicality on the Elizabethan stage,[14] but another focus of criticism has been the consideration of Jaques as a portrait of, or riposte to, one of Shakespeare's contemporaries (in particular, contemporary playwrights). The portrayal of Jaques has accordingly been connected with an alleged hostility towards Ben Jonson during the so-called 'War of the Theatres' period from 1599,[15] or with allusions to John Marston, either in his own person or as represented by a character in one of his verse satires.[16]

One of the most interesting recent treatments of Jaques as satirist is that of Derek Gottlieb, who regards Jaques as an embodiment of failure because he expresses an ambition to 'Cleanse the foul body of th'infected world' (II.vii.60), then fails to make any progress in this quest. Gottlieb emphasizes Jaques's desire for, and achievement of, 'skeptical withdrawal', a position which amounts to a refusal of life's claims upon

[10] Michael Hattaway, ed., *As You Like It* (Cambridge University Press, 2009) p.26.
[11] Agnes Latham, ed., *As You Like It*, Arden edition (Routledge, 1989) p.lxxvi.
[12] Harold Jenkins, '*As You Like It*', in *Shakespeare Survey 8*, 1955, 40–51, p.45.
[13] At the first two mentions of Jaques's name he is referred to as 'the melancholy Jaques' (II.i.26, 41); the first remark addressed to him is 'It will make you melancholy, Monsieur Jaques' (II.v.9); Orlando calls him 'Monsieur Melancholy' (III.ii.286); Rosalind's first remark to him is 'They say you are a melancholy fellow' (IV.i.3).
[14] Dusinberre, ed., *As You Like It*, pp.106, 107.
[15] Grace Tiffany sees *As You Like It* as a repudiation of Jonson's attacks on romantic comedy and specifically of *Every Man Out of His Humour*: '"That Reason Wonder May Diminish": *As You Like It*, Androgyny, and the Theater Wars', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 57 No. 3, Summer 1994, 213–239.
[16] As discussed by Latham, pp. xlviii–li, who considers that 'If Jaques is a caricature of anybody it is an affectionate tribute rather than a purge', p.xlviii.

him and one that is roundly opposed by Rosalind.[17] In this interpretation, it is Rosalind's powerful engagement with life that enables her to succeed in the very 'cleansing' that Jaques seeks. Gottlieb does concede that 'Jaques's melancholy […] has something like the good of the world in view', but finds that he is not associated with any 'reanimation or conversion of the world' and, at the last, he 'finds himself without a place in the converted or healed world' and declines to stay in it.[18] In a similar vein, Grace Tiffany regards Jaques as a failed misogynist satirist, matched with Orlando as a failed Ovidian lover; their masculine obtuseness is routed by Rosalind, the spirit of true romantic comedy, who can 'transcend sexual barriers' and unites the feminine and masculine in a fruitful way.[19]

Jaques's satire, however, represents a challenge that is more subtle than such critics allow. It is not disruptive of a perverse social order in the tragic fashion (as with Vindice's satirical commentary in *The Revenger's Tragedy*); social disruption is the context in which Jaques finds himself, but he is not responsible for the topsy-turvy nature of Arden. Nor does Jaques dwell on the injustice of Duke Senior's exile. Instead, his analysis constitutes another strand in the fabric of Arden's critique of the courtly life, as well as an appraisal of Arden itself. Jaques weeps with the dying deer of Arden and laughs with the courtly professional fool. The fact that his pose as a displaced satirist is comic – we laugh *at* as well as *with* Jaques – draws attention to the satiric commentator and his social position, so that the purveyor of satire and his means of expression are exposed to scrutiny alongside his targets.

To label Jaques a failure is unconvincing, too, since his critical intelligence offers an essential balance in Arden. The Duke seeks him out because 'he's full of matter' (II.i.68), and the play endorses Jaques's emphasis on the precariousness of the human condition. He is accorded high status at the forest court, and far from being expelled at the end of the comedy, he is urged by the Duke to stay. The playwright gives Jaques the last word on the romantic relationships formed in Arden, expressed in his benediction of the nuptial couples. Moreover, in opposing Jaques to Rosalind, critics overlook his function of complementing and drawing the sting from the satirical

[17] Derek Gottlieb, *Skepticism and Belonging in Shakespeare's Comedy* (Routledge, 2016) p.146.
[18] Ibid p.173.
[19] Tiffany, '"That Reason Wonder May Diminish": *As You Like It*, Androgyny, and the Theater Wars', p.219.

critiques that Rosalind expresses (in her persona as Ganymede) on the subjects of role-playing and of romantic love. When she and Jaques confront each other in debate at the beginning of IV.i, it is Rosalind who occupies the position of satirist, while Jaques represents the (here, perhaps stereotypical) melancholic. When he claims that 'the sundry contemplation' of his travels has wrapped him 'in a most humorous sadness', Rosalind's reply is in the vein of the satirical commentator: 'I fear you have sold your own lands to see other men's. Then to have seen much and to have nothing is to have rich eyes and poor hands' (IV.i.17–22).

Jaques may self-consciously nourish his own sense of alienation and melancholy – 'I do love it better than laughing' (IV.i.4) – but he establishes himself as a different type of dramatic malcontent. As Latham writes, 'We never see him in a mood approaching depression and he is entirely free of the malcontent's sense of personal injury. He never suggests that the world has treated him more unfairly than anyone else. He proposes to "cleanse" it, but not to pay scores'.[20] Jaques does, however, display the urge to communicate and need for an audience that is characteristic of motivated discontent, rather than consistently seeking the solitude that is congenial to melancholia. He is positioned as an outsider, yet he maintains a keen observation of the relationships developing in Arden. He is 'a kind of comic Hamlet'[21] because of his tendency to brood upon the ills of his society rather than to act decisively in pursuit of a remedy. Also, the intellectual engagement he demonstrates in connection with Touchstone,[22] Rosalind/Ganymede[23] and Orlando[24] correlates with Hamlet's contemplative study of the Elsinore players, the gravedigger, and Fortinbras.

The particular type of melancholy demonstrated by Jaques is a subject of debate within the play as well as for its critics. As noted in the previous chapter, he claims it is 'a melancholy of mine own, compounded of many simples' (IV.i.15–16), while Rosalind decides that he is suffering from a traveller's melancholy (19–20). His sardonic manner clearly contrasts with the demeanour of Silvius, the play's melancholy lover, who is 'all made of sighs and tears' (V.ii.80). Despite his own

[20] Latham, ed., *As You Like It*, p.xlviii.
[21] Mangan, *A Preface to Shakespeare's Comedies*, p.213; Mangan, however, stresses Jaques's solitude.
[22] 'Go thou with me / And let me counsel thee' (III.iii.86–87).
[23] 'I prithee, pretty youth, let me be better acquainted with thee' (IV.i.1–2).
[24] 'Will you sit down with me, and we two will rail against our mistress the world and all our misery?' (III.ii.270–271).

denial (IV.i.10), some critics have diagnosed a scholarly melancholia in Jaques – again, like Hamlet – since he has evidently received a considerable education. Occasionally this interpretation is linked with the coincidence that the second son of Rowland de Boys is also called Jaques and is said to be 'at school' (I.i.5) until his sudden appearance (referred to only as 'second brother') at the play's end. In this reading, the two characters called Jaques coalesce into one persona, each 'a kind of double' of the other, perhaps because their separation is merely a result of a 'misstep' during the writing of the play.[25] To Anthony Wolk, Jaques represents the sinful 'pride of life' that belongs to those devoted to self-advancement through scholarly study, as does the middle brother in Shakespeare's source, Thomas Lodge's *Rosalynde*.[26] Jaques's cerebral approach, appropriate to the scholar, is shown in the way he seeks out interlocutors willing to debate with him, and in his tendency to 'moralize' any 'spectacle' (II.i.44).

This moralizing is rooted in a courtly culture. When he comments on life in Arden, Jaques's anthropomorphic metaphors convert the natural into an urban society; he compares the passing herd of deer to 'fat and greasy citizens' callously abandoning 'the poor and broken bankrupt' represented by their wounded fellow (55–57). As Bridget Gellert Lyons notes, there are 'traditional associations between deer and melancholy solitude […] The deer who carries his horns on his head is also the natural cuckold or victim of usurpation; tradition associated him with the melancholy of men for that reason'.[27] Jaques is interested in such analogies between rural life and a courtly and urban society. This urbanizing effect is foreshadowed when Duke Senior calls the deer 'poor dappled fools' and 'native burghers of this desert city' (22–23), and finds 'tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, / Sermons in stones' (16–17). Orlando later provides an echo when he declares 'these trees shall be my books' (III.ii.5) as he entrusts his poems to the forest. Duke Senior and Orlando, with their references to 'tongues', 'sermons' and 'books', share an assumption that the forest and/or pastureland represented by Arden can readily find their expression in

[25] Cynthia Marshall, 'The Doubled Jaques and Constructions of Negation in *As You Like It*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 49 No. 4, Winter 1998, 375–392, p.375. Harold Jenkins, in '*As You Like It'*, writes: 'It seems clear enough that these two men with the same name were originally meant to be one,' p.42.
[26] Anthony Wolk, 'The Extra Jaques in *As You Like It*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 23 No. 1, Winter 1972, 101–105.
[27] Bridget Gellert Lyons, *Voices of Melancholy: Studies in Literary Treatments of Melancholy in Renaissance England* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971) p.52.

spoken and written language, just as the city does; if Arden is a 'state of mind' more than a physical location,[28] it is a literary one.

Words, especially witty ones, are an important feature of Arden, not only as an expression of the passions and intellect but as a tool for concealing, revealing or furthering human desires. Touchstone and Jaques both choose to engage in wit-combats, and as noted in the previous chapter Touchstone has rather more success than Jaques. When Jaques challenges Orlando in III.ii, the melancholic finds himself rebuffed by this quintessential romantic lover who is 'full of pretty answers', ones that Jaques suspects are the fruits of plagiarism (263–265). But he swiftly admits to grudging admiration for Orlando's 'nimble wit', and wishes they might 'rail against' the world together (268–271). Orlando's refusal to engage in such railing is echoed in the following act in Rosalind's corresponding encounter with Jaques, where she expresses her disapproval of his 'traveller's' melancholy (IV.i). When Rosalind states 'I had rather have a fool to make me merry than experience to make me sad' (24–26), she may be juxtaposing the experienced Jaques with either the 'foolish' lover Orlando (whose 'merry' interjection 'Good day and happiness, dear Rosalind' immediately follows) or the professional fool Touchstone. In either case, Rosalind – like Orlando – declines the opportunity to hear Jaques discoursing on his melancholic 'experience', preferring the 'merry' madness of romantic love.

Jaques's melancholy, his satire and his wit-combats are those of a literate urban culture; it seems appropriate, therefore, for him to express himself using theatrical tropes. It is characteristic of the play as a whole, as Hattaway writes, that 'many of the inset episodes are metatheatrical, set-piece performances before onstage audiences',[29] and the most famous of these is Jaques's description – cued by Duke Senior's dramatic simile – of the ways in which 'one man in his time plays many parts'.

Jaques's 'strange eventful history'

Jaques's discourse in II.vii.140–167 famously uses the metaphor of the world as a stage in its summary of the various phases of (male) human experience. In this set-piece, Jaques conjures in his onstage and offstage audience's imagination a dramatic pageant of the 'seven ages' of a man's life, as if performed in sequence by seven solo

[28] Hattaway, ed., *As You Like It*, p.4.
[29] Ibid p.11.

actors. These actors signify a single identity evolving through time, so the viewpoint created by Jaques for his audiences is one that surveys human existence from a god-like perspective.

Those critics who disparage Jaques's vision as excessively negative or reductive[30] are presumably objecting to the fact that he outlines human life-stages as they are shaped by biology, and therefore nature, much more than by cultures or ethics. The development he describes, from a 'mewling' baby to the 'mere oblivion' of extreme old age, is certainly prey to the cultural pressures that mould the behaviour of schoolboy, lover, soldier, and justice, but it is the individual, not the social, context that is the focus of Jaques's description. The archetypal life story sketched by Jaques is that of an apparently solitary man responding to imperatives that are mostly biological, rendering him subject to time and, ultimately, death. Famously, this speech is immediately preceded and followed by scenes where the young Orlando cares for a helpless old man; this young hero has moreover already been seen to implicitly challenge the power of time by confidently assuring Rosalind 'There's no clock in the forest' (III.ii.292–293). This framing is cited by some critics as exposing, even discrediting, the alleged pessimism of Jaques's speech.[31] But in fact the framing is consistent not only with Jaques's portraits of youth and age, but with the underlying tensions between the drama's forest and court settings.

Arden, as well as being peopled by those who work the land for a living, both contains and is contained by a ducal court and various courting couples. For the courtly characters, Arden symbolizes the 'natural', but a nature that is idealized in the pastoral tradition, where not only has the 'clock' – associated with a sophisticated but constraining culture – been banished, but time itself loses power. Every character is not only a product of nature, however, but is shaped by shared cultures and the bonds created with others; both nature and culture transcend individual, time-bound lives. The focus of Jaques's speech is on the inevitable trajectory of an individual life, but

[30] Latham calls Jaques's speech 'cynical' and claims that 'The whole atmosphere of the place contradicts it', and 'few hearts have not been chilled by the dead march of its cruel monosyllables': *As You Like It*, p.lxxvi; Bloom writes that it expresses Jaques's 'natural reductionism', in *Shakespeare and the Invention of the Human*, p.216.

[31] Hattaway writes that the entrance of Orlando with Adam 'gives the lie to his sardonicism': *As You Like It*, p.18; the tradition that Shakespeare himself acted the role of Adam (cited, for example, by Bloom in *Shakespeare and the Invention of the Human*, p.203, and Dusinberre in *As You Like It*, p.363 and II.vii.167.1n) is consonant with this interpretation.

while Jaques may in some moods affect to be the solitary melancholic, he is intimately involved in the affairs of both the court and the couples. Nature and culture, individuality and community combine to create an environment that can aptly be compared to a theatre. The framed metaphor of the stage offers a moment of metadramatic self-consciousness for the audience. Just as the characters inhabiting Arden frame it as a rural idyll, yet one that is analogous to a communal urban space, the theatrical company at the Globe uses Shakespeare's words to create a representation of Arden that is timeless and fantastical yet immediately engaging and familiar to its urban audience.[32]

Jaques's speech, an exercise in typology, is not contradicted by either Orlando's compassion or old Adam's faithfulness, any more than these qualities are negated by Jaques's no-nonsense retort upon Orlando's melodramatic entrance 'with sword drawn' crying 'Forbear and eat no more!' – 'Why, I have ate none yet' (88–89). Each perspective comments on the other. The power and grace of Orlando's care for the old man are all the more vividly demonstrated in the context of the 'natural' development of human life upon which Jaques's 'seven ages' speech expounds. This tells a familiar story with a beginning, middle and end, which inevitably encompasses both the comic and the tragic. The focus of Jaques's speech may be narrow, but it does not deny the social bonds that are just out of view: the 'mewling' baby with which this drama begins is specifically in a 'nurse's arms', but the nurse's care is in any case implicit in the fact that the baby survives to reach the second of the seven stages, just as the discipline of a teacher and/or parent is implied in the description of the 'whining schoolboy'; in a second synecdoche, comparable to the 'nurse's arms', a love object represented by merely an 'eyebrow' is present for the lover.

The speech envisions the archetypal man playing a succession of roles that occur in a preordained trajectory, rather than shaping his own destiny. This evocation of a series of stock characters prompts spectators to recall that they are watching actors playing easily recognizable parts, and at the same time points up the fact that far from being reductive, like Jaques's speech itself these roles are transformed by the theatrical context; vivid characters such as the lover Orlando and the aged man Adam open up

[32] Dusinberre discusses the interpretations of Arden – with its nuances relating to English, Flemish and French forests – that were available to the first audiences in *As You Like It*, pp.46–52.

seemingly endless possibilities. The audience witnesses this creative transformation in the drama as a whole playing out against the apparently circumscribed and predictable framework suggested by Jaques's seven archetypal roles. These metadramatic effects invite comparison to those created in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where Bottom's ostensibly limited and down-to-earth approach to the dramatic illusion produces such delightful reverberations. In 'Pyramus and Thisbe', Bottom's Pyramus is a one-dimensional, stereotypical lover and the character is staged within a highly constrained dramatic context (to put it charitably), yet a startlingly individualized portrayal is created for both the onstage audience and for spectators in the playhouse. A brief examination of Bottom's dramatic theory in the light of Jaques's speech will throw some light on the comic malcontent's theatrical self-consciousness, and a consideration of his acting technique will point up Jaques's satirical distance from comic role-play.

Bottom is the antithesis of a malcontent; he is supremely comfortable in his own identity, even when endowed with an ass's head and in the arms of a fairy queen. In contrast to the psychologically complex dramatic malcontent, he is a guileless vehicle for metadrama because of the naïvety of his conception of drama, and his openness to 'translating' himself into any role while remaining incontrovertibly himself. Any new identity merely reflects his enthusiastic embrace of all the possibilities entailed in being Bottom. He would doubtless offer to undertake all of Jaques's seven roles on any stage, and give a memorable performance in each, despite the fact that they seem to call for seven different physical types of performer. Moreover, Bottom would surely – through sheer force of personality – 'frame' each of those stock roles by evoking the multiplicity of human experience, in a way analogous to that achieved in *As You Like It*. Although Bottom, like Jaques, cannot escape the biological imperatives implied in the 'seven ages', likewise he cannot be excluded from or contained by any of the categories of experience described.

Bottom and his fellow players share a firm belief in the transformational power of theatre, despite their literalist approach to the staging, roles and action of 'Pyramus and Thisbe'. They assume that Snug the joiner will easily frighten the ladies in the role of Lion because his embodiment of that creature will be completely convincing: simply introducing Snug in role with an appropriate costume will be sufficient to create, in the minds of an audience, a threatening beast, perceived not as a dramatic

event but as a 'real' one. It is thus taken for granted that the semiotics of the theatre are more powerful than considerations of mere 'reality', such as the unlikelihood of a lion appearing in the duke's chamber, or the materiality of Snug's costume.

This same assumption leads to the much more convincing conclusion that since the moon that may shine through the casement while the play is in progress is merely an incidental phenomenon, rather than a signifier, it will not serve their purpose: the staging of a symbolic moon is required in order to point up the meanings and associations of moonlight. Deciding to personify the moon, the amateur players follow this logic again when pondering the staging of a wall. It is an important element of the plot, so it too must be presented (rather than represented), and personified – Snout must be costumed 'to signify wall', and then announce 'I, one Snout by name, present a Wall'.[33] Personification is also a persistent feature of the verse in 'Pyramus and Thisbe'. Thisbe's mantle is vital to the story, so it is said to be 'slain' (V.i.144); hero and heroine make direct addresses to (and therefore create signifiers of) objects that inattentive spectators may otherwise fail to note, such as tears, swords, tongues, and blades (288–297, 335–337). No confidence is shown in their spectators' ability to use their judgement at the same time as engaging their imagination with the staged spectacle – an ability that Shakespeare relies upon in his audience. A Shakespearean *locus classicus* on the dramatic imagination, the Prologue to *Henry V*, emphasizes the mental processes involved when an audience imaginatively transforms poetic language into perceived dramatic effects; the audience is confidently enjoined to 'Suppose', 'Piece out', 'Think', and finally 'judge'.[34] Spectators of *As You Like It* are expected to 'piece out' the dramatic representations implied in Jaques's 'seven ages' speech with their observations of the whole play, just as they place 'Pyramus and Thisbe' within *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

The strenuous efforts of the 'Pyramus and Thisbe' performers to impersonate characters and create theatrical significance serve only to draw attention to the processes of drama, and to the personality of the actor behind each role. Theatrical illusion is continually invoked but remains elusive, despite Bottom's confidence that

[33] *A Midsummer Night's Dream* III.i.64, V.i.155; all quotations from Sukanta Chaudhuri, ed., *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Arden edition (Bloomsbury, 2017).
[34] *Henry V* Prologue 19, 23, 26, 34; quotations from T.W. Craik, ed., *King Henry V*, Arden edition (Routledge, 1995).

it will survive – even be enhanced by – the ruptures he causes by responding to audience comments in his own person. The reactions modelled by the onstage audience doggedly resist all illusion, dominated as they are by literalist objections to stage symbolism. 'This is the greatest error of all the rest. The man should be put into the lanthorn; how is it else the man in'th' moon?' (V.i.240–242). Meanwhile for the theatre audience, watching Bottom perform the role of Pyramus reproduces the effect of watching a known player in a new role. This effect is doubled where Bottom himself is played by a well-known actor. The failure of the dramatic illusion in Bottom's performance as Pyramus, underlined by onstage audience reactions, is directly proportional to the potency with which actor and playwright create the dramatic illusion of Bottom himself.

Stephen Booth suggests that the actors playing Flute, Snout, Starveling and Snug doubled as Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth and Mustardseed.[35] If so, the spectacle of Bottom (an enthusiastic advocate of doubling) in the role of Pyramus surrounded by these actors performing as Thisbe, Wall, Moonshine and Lion creates echoes of his earlier starring role in the interlude at the fairy queen's bower. There too he demonstrates his easy-going perception that literalism can coexist alongside symbolism, when he humorously reduces the fairies to the natural-world functions implied by their names, while simultaneously understanding them to be supernatural attendants to the fairy queen.[36] Bottom's dream-within-a-dream is thus recalled in his play-within-a-play. In juxtaposing 'Bottom's Dream' (IV.i.213–214) with Bottom's amateur dramatics, as in much else, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* brings together the Elizabethan tropes 'life is like a dream' and 'life is like a play', so that Shakespeare's drama becomes, as in its title, dream-like.[37] In *As You Like It*, Jaques takes up a detached standpoint from which he can observe the dream-like goings-on in Arden, and in his verbal depiction of the seven ages, life is compared to a theatrical performance that appears to have the insubstantiality of a dream.

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[35] Stephen Booth, 'Speculations on Doubling in Shakespeare's Plays' in Philip C. McGuire and David A. Samuelson, eds, *Shakespeare: The Theatrical Dimension* (AMS Press, 1979) p.108.

[36] 'I shall desire you of more acquaintance, good Master Cobweb: if I cut my finger, I shall make bold with you' (III.i.175–177), and so on.

[37] The historical relationship between the two similes is examined in Lynda G. Christian, *Theatrum Mundi: The History of an Idea* (Garland Publishing, 1987), p.71 and *passim*.

When discussing early modern dream-interpretation manuals, Erika T. Lin writes: 'In the context of these manuals, to say that theatre is "like a dream" would be to say that theatre signifies something *other* than what it mimetically represents', because 'both had to be mined for their true significance. It was this issue – interpretation, *not* verisimilitude – that motivated comparisons between theatre and dreams.'[38] Interpretation of all that he observes is Jaques's meat and drink. In a different sense Bottom, too, when presenting his drama before the duke, is deeply concerned with interpretation. In pursuit of 'correct' understanding, he is willing to step outside the dramatic illusion and offer explanations, and to entangle symbolism with verisimilitude in a way that fatally compromises both.

A dream, even Bottom's 'lived' dream of the fairy queen, is usually a private and subjective experience, whereas theatre is a communal event. But the experiences of the lovers in the Athenian wood, who find 'all their minds transfigured so together' (V.i.24), are like a shared dream, as is the sojourn in Arden to the exiled characters of *As You Like It*. When all the other characters prepare to leave Arden for new 'awakened' lives at the end of the play, however, Jaques demurs. He remains essentially himself, rather than being reshaped by the comic ending – an effect not unlike Bottom's premature rising up after performing the death of Pyramus, demonstrating that he remains irrepressibly Bottom. But in the case of Jaques a satirical distance is maintained between his ideas and the trajectory of *As You Like It*'s romantic plot, whereas Bottom is fully integrated into the dream-like Athens he inhabits.

The fact that Jaques is singled out at the dénouement as one who is 'for other than for dancing measures' (V.iv.191) hints that there is something provisional about *As You Like It*'s 'happy ending'. The betrothed couples depart from Arden and return to court along with their duke, newly restored to his authority, but in Duke Frederick Arden will continue to shelter a dispossessed and exiled former duke – albeit one who has willingly exiled himself as an expression of penitence. Jaques is to remain behind, the only character in a relatively unchanged position at the end of the play, prolonging his voluntary exile and continuing to discover 'much matter to be heard and learned' (V.iv.183). Critics who consider that Jaques is deliberately excluded from the play's

[38] Erika T. Lin, *Shakespeare and the Materiality of Performance* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) pp.81, 84.

comic resolution, or even that he is made its scapegoat,[39] fail to note that aspects of the comic spirit and the spirit of Arden thus find a continuation in Jaques, who in his benediction speech 'bequeaths' to the courting couples the serious business of marriage, and to Duke Senior and his court the hard realities of governing, while retaining his own freedom to question and to satirize.

There can be no doubt that, as Anne Barton writes, Jaques's 'withdrawal at the end impoverishes the comic society about to leave Arden'. The next section of this chapter examines Barton's further contention that 'In *Twelfth Night*, the next of the comedies, the fragmentation only hinted at in the last scene of *As You Like It* became actual, as Shakespeare began to unbuild his own comic form at its point of greatest vulnerability: the ending'.[40]

Malvolio and the casting out of folly

Like Barton, many critics consider that Malvolio sounds a dominant note at the end of *Twelfth Night*. This judgement is supported by the fact that, from the first, it has been recognized that this character's relatively small part achieves surprising prominence in the play as a whole. The plot to dupe him was the earliest noticed aspect of the comedy, in John Manningham's brief report of 1602;[41] in 1623 the Master of the Revels used the title 'Malvolio' in listing a performance, and Charles I wrote 'Malvolio' as a marginal note against the play's name in his copy of the 1623 Second Folio.[42] Keir Elam concludes that 'There is little doubt that in early performances the play's protagonist was the steward'.[43]

The first critic to note anything other than amusement at the gulling of Malvolio was Hazlitt, who wrote that 'we feel a regard for Malvolio, and sympathise with his gravity, his smiles, his cross garters, his yellow stockings, and imprisonment', and 'poor Malvolio's treatment […] is a little hard'.[44] Questions about how and for how long we laugh at Malvolio have concerned recent critics – 'It is when Malvolio is

[39] Priest, in '*Oratio* and *Negotium*: Manipulative Modes in *As You Like It*', p.274, writes that Jaques is a *pharmakos* figure, 'cast out so that the comic spirit may make conclusion'. See p.213 below.
[40] Anne Barton, in Malcolm Bradbury and David Palmer, eds, *Shakespearian Comedy*, Stratford-upon-Avon Studies 14 (Edward Arnold, 1972) p.171.
[41] Robert Parker Sorlien, ed., *The Diary of John Manningham of the Middle Temple, 1602–1603* (University of Rhode Island, 1976) p.48.
[42] Both quoted in Elam, ed., *Twelfth Night*, pp.4–5.
[43] Ibid p.123.
[44] Hazlitt, *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*, pp.222, 225.

treated as a madman that uneasiness is felt'[45] – and he is a test case for ideas about what is comic, and where empathy begins.

The place of Olivia's steward in the tradition of dramatic malcontents has received less critical attention. Malvolio's name suggests he harbours more ill-will and resentment than melancholia.[46] Despite the fact that Olivia says he is 'sad and civil' (III.iv.5), and Fabian associates him with being 'boiled to death with melancholy' (II.v.3), it is Orsino (II.iv.72), Olivia (II.v.196), and Viola (II.iv.113) who are more convincingly connected with melancholy in the play, as noted in the previous chapter. In regard to these characters' names, the play seems to encourage us to notice near-anagrams: 'Viola' and 'Olivia' fail by only a single letter to form a pair of perfect anagrams; 'Malvolio' adds the negative prefix 'mal' to the same character group; and the hint 'M.O.A.I. doth sway my life' sets up a puzzle that the steward can solve only when he accepts the need 'to crush this a little' to fit his name (II.v.106, 137). Patterns of letters that teasingly fail to fit a desirable configuration are evocative of the mistaken identities and tangled love pairings of the play, which cannot be resolved until Sebastian appears in the final scene to make these odds all even.

When, at the end of the play, marriage partnerships are formed and mistakes rectified, Malvolio is clearly a humiliated misfit; at its beginning, he is something of an unacknowledged malcontent. His professional demeanour evidently suits Olivia's self-image as a bereaved woman heading a noble household, but Malvolio harbours a bitter and barely concealed disapproval towards every member of that establishment apart from Olivia herself, in regard to whom he nurtures secret ambitions. He is not an intellectual, discontented about the state of society, or even about his personal status within that society. Nor is he striking the pose of a satirist, or performing a role as the scourge of folly. Instead, his dissatisfaction is focused on the unruly state of Olivia's household, and his subordinate place within it. Rather than satirizing the faults of others in the manner of a malcontent, he represents the satirical embodiment of the strait-laced and the foolishly ambitious, and by displaying a combination of those two traits he creates an irresistibly comic effect. Any melancholy in his make-up is

[45] J.M. Lothian and T.W. Craik, eds, *Twelfth Night*, Arden edition (Routledge, 1975) pp.lviii–lix.
[46] Mangan points out that his name can be read as meaning either 'I want something badly' or 'I wish ill': *A Preface to Shakespeare's Comedies*, p.244.

explicitly (if temporarily) abandoned when he dons yellow stockings and claims he is 'Not black in my mind' (III.iv.25).

Like Jaques with his critiques of Arden, Malvolio appeals to the audience in that he is undeniably justified in his condemnations of intemperance, in a play that from its opening lines is concerned with excess. Yet this does not arouse audience sympathy for him because he clearly represents his own kind of intemperance, insisting puritanically upon restraint for others while lacking self-awareness. He seems even less likely than Jaques to effect any change for the better in the society in which he finds himself, and does not admit the audience to his reflections in a way that would make them complicit with his actions or desires. The elaborately fine language with which he expresses disapproval[47] is easily deflated and made to sound bombastic by Sir Toby. When he consistently denies his own agency by emphasizing that he acts and speaks under Olivia's instruction, the effect is not dutiful self-abnegation but pompous officiousness.

His pride in his ability to follow instructions brings about his downfall when he is directed to wear uncharacteristic smiles and yellow stockings. He lacks the imagination to apprehend the trick played upon him, and even when commanded to play so uncongenial a part as the yellow-stockinged wooer, he is conscious of its discomforts but not its incongruities. Malvolio is a pitiable vehicle for metadrama because he lacks the wit to recognize just how unlikely it is that Olivia is the covert director of this particular performance, or to acknowledge his own inability to inhabit the allotted role in a convincing manner. Fabian's exclamation 'If this were played upon a stage now, I could condemn it as an improbable fiction' (III.iv.123–124) draws attention not only to the theatrical context, but to Malvolio's distance from apprehending the performative nature of his own actions. Under direction, Malvolio is content to adopt new ways of dressing and comporting himself in return for a promised advantage, but we see no transformation in him beyond the – admittedly startling – costume and facial expression. Unlike Bottom, who simply absorbs other ways of being in a manner that expands his own personality, Malvolio is doomed to remain the blinkered steward in unsuitable clothes, and is easily duped because he has no sense that 'reality' is a construct, open to manipulation by others. As discussed above, Bottom concerns himself with shared interpretive possibilities, both in

[47] For example, II.iii.93–99.

expounding on the surreality of his 'dream', which he hopes will be made into a ballad by Quince (IV.i.203–217), and in laboriously creating stage scenes for 'Pyramus and Thisbe'. By contrast Malvolio, in his solipsism, is easily persuaded to interpret Maria's forged letter and Sir Topas's supposed visit as authentic accounts of an objective reality. There is no scope for flexibility of interpretation in Malvolio's world; as David Richman puts it, 'The laughter that Malvolio generates springs in large part from his being thoroughly and seamlessly what the other characters say he is'.[48]

Malvolio's gullibility, as exploited by the over-hearers in the box-tree and by Feste impersonating Sir Topas, makes the audience conscious of using other senses and other knowledge: they can see and hear the tricksters and understand their motivations. In thus sharing the perspective of Malvolio's tormentors – who are themselves audience as well as script-writers and actors – the play's spectators are compelled to identify with them to a certain extent. This identification may become an uncomfortable position for an audience to hold. Malvolio, despite all his delusions, remains doggedly rational when confined as a madman, 'in a dark room and bound', which makes for a disturbing episode even though Sir Toby has promised eventually to 'have mercy on him' (III.iv.131, 134–135). In this scene it is Feste, the audience's representative, who seems unhinged, adopting a wholly superfluous disguise which, as Maria points out (IV.ii.63–64), Malvolio is unable to see. Feste then plays two roles at once, enacting a confrontation between himself and Sir Topas. This 'stage psychomachia'[49] no doubt showcased Robert Armin's vocal and comedy skills in the part of Feste. The redundant disguise and multiple voices can only be appreciated from the viewpoint of the theatre audience, and point up the artifice of performance. As Peter Thomson puts it, 'The Globe audience did not watch Feste disguising himself to deceive Malvolio, so much as Robert Armin getting ready for his big scene'.[50] An excess of energy and imagination is clearly at work, and it is demonstrated that this can obscure as well as reveal what is authentic. Spectators in the theatre are enriched by the display of ingenuity and skill, but also witness its demeaning effect on Malvolio. This sense of audience complicity in his torment

[48] David Richman, *Laughter, Pain, and Wonder: Shakespeare's Comedies and the Audience in the Theater* (Associated University Presses, 1990) p.24.
[49] Alan C. Dessen, *Elizabethan Drama and the Viewer's Eye* (University of North Carolina Press, 1977) p.149.
[50] Peter Thomson, *Shakespeare's Theatre* (Routledge, 2nd ed., 1992) p.104.

makes it inevitable that Malvolio's parting threat of revenge on 'the whole pack of you' (V.i.371) resonates across the theatre.

At Stratford in 1955, Malvolio's outburst as performed by Sir Laurence Olivier was famously characterized as 'the cry of a man unmade'.[51] Was this the kind of impression received by the first Globe audiences? It is possible that theatregoers experienced what Barbara Correll terms 'metatextual awareness of generic indeterminacy',[52] that is, awareness that Malvolio's story has a tragic potential that is only partially mitigated by its comic setting. Correll goes on to suggest that Malvolio's tragic potential had an afterlife in the Globe, when Webster developed the theme in his treatment of the two stewards in *The Duchess of Malfi*, Antonio and Bosola. The former steward represents the fulfilment of Malvolio's dreams in that the Duchess reveals her love for him, while the latter ends by taking 'a clumsy sort of revenge on the whole lot of them'.[53] Illyria and Malfi are undeniably different contexts in which to speak of vengeance; Maria talks of taking 'revenge' on Malvolio when she devises her trick with the letter (II.iii.147–148), but she also refers to her deception as giving him a 'physic' (167), which suggests a more benign corrective. But Malvolio's climactic cry, overshadowing the marriage promises at the end of the play, would doubtless have a powerful effect for an audience attuned to generic conventions, especially if the actor playing Malvolio were familiar from tragic roles.[54]

This final scene of the play brings about several rather jolting collisions. Malvolio's understandable anger shares the stage with the somewhat troubled pairings of Orsino with Viola (still dressed as Cesario, the target of Orsino's violent threats) and of Olivia with the lately misidentified and mystified Sebastian. The tone is also affected by the solemn, incantatory lines with which Viola and Sebastian formally recognize each other and remember the death of their father. The movement towards ceremoniousness appropriate to the play's ending is disrupted by Malvolio, but it

[51] Noted in John Russell Brown, *Shakespeare's Plays in Performance* (Edward Arnold, 1966) p.207.
[52] Barbara Correll, 'Malvolio at Malfi: Managing Desire in Shakespeare and Webster', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 58 No. 1, Spring 2007, 65–92, p.68.
[53] Ibid p.84.
[54] Scholars speculate that Malvolio was played by Richard Burbage, fresh from playing Hamlet; see David Grote, *The Best Actors in the World: Shakespeare and His Acting Company* (Greenwood Press, 2002) pp.105–106. T.W. Baldwin had earlier suggested that Augustine Phillips played Malvolio, having also taken the roles of Cassius, Don John, and Duke Frederick in *As You Like It*: *The Organization and Personnel of the Shakespearean Company* (Princeton University Press, 1927) p.255.

gives his resentment a significant edge, especially since he expresses this with the dignity of blank verse for the first time.

In *Twelfth Night*, then, the expected achievement of self-knowledge and harmony at the play's end is challenged by an appreciable measure of alienation and adversity; Malvolio's humiliation chimes with the sudden and painful rejection of Sir Andrew by Sir Toby earlier in the scene, and the equally sudden news that the captain, guarantor of Viola's femininity, 'Is now in durance, at Malvolio's suit' (V.i.272). An audience will also register the silent exclusion of Antonio from the happiness of the dénouement. It is clear that compared to *As You Like It*, as Richman writes, 'Comic joy exists only for the few and the fortunate'.[55] This 'joy' is in itself attenuated even for 'the few'. The spectators do not see Viola in her 'woman's weeds' (269), as they do Rosalind, and in place of Rosalind's teasing epilogue is Feste's melancholy song, which recalls Jaques's 'seven ages' speech – it too depicts the passing of time in relation to the inescapable stages of human life. Feste's song reduces the ages of man to four stanzas, representing in turn a boy, a grown man, a married man, and an aged man, for all of whom 'the rain it raineth every day'. After rapidly summarizing these four ages of man, the song culminates in an allusion to the great age of the earth, before concluding 'But that's all one, our play is done' (400). There is to be no framing device contextualizing these sentiments, such as the framing of Jaques's 'seven ages' speech discussed above.

In a passage alluded to on page 208 above, Dale G. Priest writes of Malvolio and Jaques: 'Both will flee from the community as *pharmakos* figures, cast out so that the comic spirit may make conclusion'.[56] The above analysis has, however, shown that the two malcontented characters are not scapegoats, but are more closely associated with doing the casting out than being the object of it; each rejects important aspects of the state of affairs at the end of the play, despite being urged by other characters to make peace with it. In the world of Shakespearean comedy, self-knowledge is available to those willing to submit to a purgative experience, but what is striking about the humiliated Malvolio is that he refuses to so submit, and the play's ending allows him to persevere in his humour. Malvolio's cry for revenge has a more disturbing effect than Jaques's benign refusal of mere 'dancing measures', and is

[55] Richman, *Laughter, Pain, and Wonder*, p.171.
[56] Priest, '*Oratio* and *Negotium*: Manipulative Modes in *As You Like It*', p.274.

more startlingly at odds with the expectations set up for the play's dénouement. But each character, as the audience leaves the theatre, represents the knowledge that, as Anne Barton puts it, 'there are certain kinds of experience after all, certain questions, which lie outside the scope of the happy ending'.[57] *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night* end with Jaques and Malvolio indicating an alternative focus for audience attention, away from the romance plot and towards a more satirical consideration of the manners of a society, and the ethical standards under which it operates.

Whereas the tragic malcontent is preoccupied with achieving self-vindication by seeking redress for the particular wrongs he has suffered, and the tragedy is brought about by his actions rather than his words, the comic malcontent is more of a theorist. He expresses his need for self-affirmation and a just acknowledgement of his individuality through verbal condemnations – often indiscriminate – of social systems that are uncongenial to him, and of his imperfect fellow human beings, particularly those perceived as more powerful or successful. In comedy, personal grievances become more amorphous, and are heavily disguised as selfless principles which, for various reasons, the malcontent is unable to persuade the world to put into practice.

In tragedy, the malcontent's destiny culminates in violent clashes with a deeply flawed society. The comic malcontent may, as evidenced by Malvolio, regard himself as a tragic hero, but his railing is undermined by the fact that he is clearly a creature of a particular society and partakes of its flaws, so that when he rejects it as unworthy of him the effect is often to point up its positive values as well as its faults. Passionate invective becomes comic hyperbole. Firmly embedded in the society from which he longs to remain aloof, the comic malcontent is shown to be unable to defeat it, even if he himself remains essentially undefeated. He appeals directly to the audience's personal experience of everyday frustrations and injustices, and the comedy lies in the ineffectuality of his complaints, whether these appear reasonable or unreasonable. Through its varying degrees of sympathy, the audience shares in the creation of an incisive, as well as amusing, critique of contemporary life.

[57] Barton, in Bradbury and Palmer, eds, *Shakespearian Comedy*, p.170.

Conclusion

This thesis has argued that on the early modern stage, the dramatic malcontent encapsulated the energies and complexities of an emerging political and social culture, and of a blossoming art form. It has shown that the malcontent figure – evolving from medieval traditions of performance style and of character typology, including humours theory – represented a fresh and powerful connection between the stage and audiences at a time of rapid innovation in the London playhouses. In the first decade of the seventeenth century these theatres hosted a variety of striking malcontent figures which, with their characteristic tendencies to use direct address and display metatheatrical self-awareness, were perfectly placed to create a powerful sense of intimacy with audiences who crowded close to the (often familiar) actors performing in shared light.

The challenge manifested by a malcontent face-to-face with an audience in a morally ambiguous context represents a microcosm of the challenge posed by the theatre itself. Understood by spectators to be appealing not only to their external senses but the 'internal senses' of imagination, memory and the faculty of judgement, and using rhetoric to evoke powerful emotional responses, the character embodied a site of subjectivity figuring a newly assertive type of self-awareness. Audiences growing familiar with the cultural practices of the playhouse, and sensitized to the performative aspects of the self, delighted in the metatheatricality associated with the malcontent. A figure whose functions included commentating on character and action, and serving as an intermediary between stage and auditorium, found fitting means of expression in the well-established *theatrum mundi* metaphor. The malcontent offered a playful or profound exposition of the instability of the self, and developed critiques of the human propensity for role-play. Interrogating distinctions between the genuine and the false, the natural and the constructed, the malcontent strove to be not only actor and stage manager, but to mould the responses of his own audience. Inherently theatrical, too, were the tropes of melancholia with which the malcontent was often linked, with their emphasis on gesture, costume, and modes of speech, and the tendency for a disconnect to develop between contemplation and action.

Audiences responded as a community as well as individually, taking not only an aesthetic interest in modes of theatrical representation, but a social interest in character development (in the light of contemporary ideas about temperaments), and a

moral interest in the principles espoused and acted upon by the malcontent. One of the most significant issues emerging from this study has been the challenge for audiences to respond to the problem of personal justice in a rigidly hierarchical society. As the study has shown, the malcontent who is the protagonist of a revenge tragedy brings into stark focus the dilemmas raised by religious and legal prohibitions on personal vengeance; spectators' fascination with the predicaments and (often spectacular) antagonisms of revenge tragedy is evidenced by the remarkable popularity of the genre. The satisfying story arc delineating the malcontent's tragic career highlights the narrative of discontent and a dramatic transformation from victim to perpetrator, calling on the audience to embrace and resolve conflicts relating to integrity and justice.

This thesis has tracked an association between the self-consciousness of popular genres, with their tendency for self-parody, and a readiness to adopt satirical perspectives. In tragedy, the satiric aspects of the malcontent's persona broaden the range of references and underline an engagement with morally complex issues, by clarifying the principles at stake between the forces in conflict. The association of melancholia with both intellectualism and madness, and with dangerous political dissent, provide a contextual framework for the malcontent's mordant irony. In comedy, the malcontent holds considerable power in modulating and enriching audience responses, his satire acting as a foil to the uncomplicated delights of the comic spirit and providing ballast for a romance plot. The disruptiveness represented by the comic malcontent is both self-limiting and constructive: Jaques strikes appealingly discordant notes in *As You Like It*, complicating the harmonies with which its romance plot ends by insisting on continuing his sceptical study of a world in which 'all the men and women' are 'merely players'.[1] A tragic malcontent has an equally incisive if less speculative relationship with the theatrical imagination. When Bosola speaks of making a fatal mistake at the end of *The Duchess of Malfi*, it is of a kind 'often seen / In a play';[2] its outline is as familiar and resonant to him as it is to the playhouse audience. Disruptiveness in tragedy – where the malcontent cannot remain merely a theorist, and is impelled to action – contributes to a dramatic

[1] *As You Like It* II.vii.141; quotation from Juliet Dusinberre, ed., *As You Like It*, Arden edition (Bloomsbury, 2006).
[2] *The Duchess of Malfi* V.v.94–95; quotation from René Weis, ed., *John Webster: The Duchess of Malfi and Other Plays* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

dénouement that deals in death and brings a climactic end to sceptical enquiry, rather than in marriage and the possibilities of continuation.

In all genres the malcontent is self-consciously performative. This study has shown that the comic malcontent shares an unexpected kinship with the fool or clown, another acerbic commentator upon the human condition, and that the metatheatricality of both character types held a powerful appeal for early modern audiences. Both take full advantage of the privilege of free speech, and use their liminal position to establish a standpoint from which to build fresh perspectives. The energy and insight associated with the comic malcontent prefigures the type of dynamism and social comment that was to flourish in later generations in the satiric wit of the comedy of manners.

Comedy, like tragedy, ultimately accepts that certain aspects of society are not susceptible to satiric correction. But the power of the malcontent character lies in his capacity to engage spectators by articulating probing questions; the dramatic self-awareness with which this figure is endowed represents a celebration of the rich imaginative resources of the playhouse.

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